

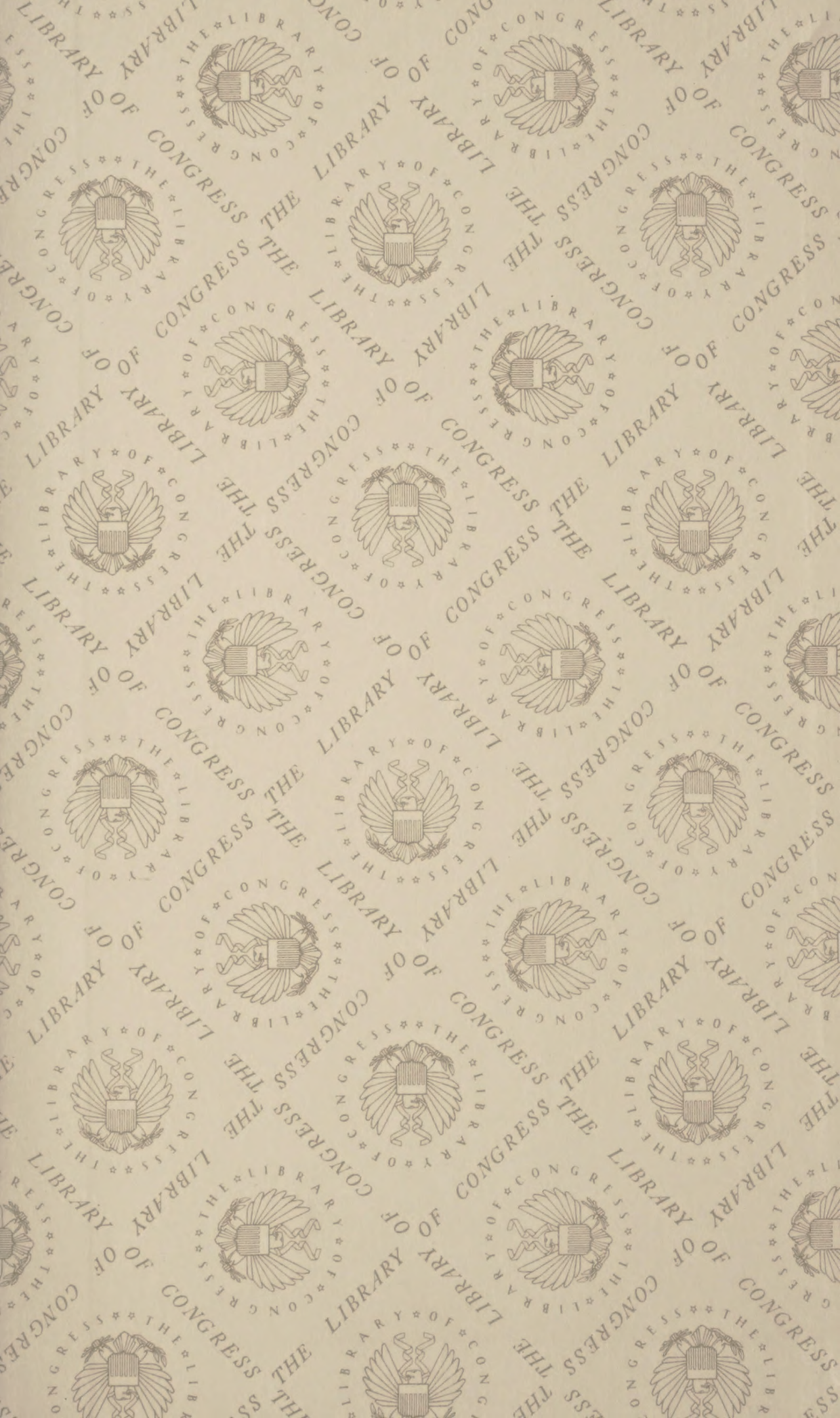
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*A MIDSUMMER DAY'S
DREAM*

A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

By

H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON

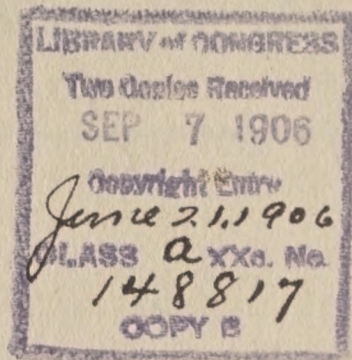
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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

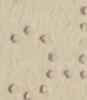
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Published September, 1906



TO
ROSAMUND MARRIOTT WATSON

You and I, my dear, have often wandered in Arcady, and have lost our way in forests mysterious. We have both had midsummer madness under the plenilune, and have smiled and jested and shed tears over the march of human (including our own) fortunes. The admirable gift of laughter obviates so many tragedies, and to live in a fairy-tale is the best that poor human nature may ask. I think, and rejoice, that we are both incurably romantic, and even at the end of a long day (should that be granted us) shall still have faith and see beauty in the disposition of the world. For to be a heretic of romance is to be old indeed, nay, to have outlived one's proper term of life.

This is such stuff as dreams are made of, yet I hope it faithfully materializes life, as mirrored in a dream lightly and ordered by happy accidents. In those bays of the Wilderness have we not often walked, and shall we not walk again in sunlight and in shadow? So that this stands in your name who have stood for so much in its making; and when our little company once more makes its entrance in Titania's Glade, let us hope, *Enter Moon-shine.*

Your affectionate husband,

H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON.

MIDSUMMER DAY, 1906.

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A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

CHAPTER I

THE DRYAD

PHILIP BANNATYNE reached the lodge gates, which gave access to Temple Park from the heath, about ten of the clock. The moon, near to her fullness, shone strongly down the avenue of Spanish chestnuts, flinging checkers almost as determined as the sun at noon. Philip's eyes passed along the low umbrageous vista of stooping trees and foundered on the sheer forest that terminated it.

"A lovely night—a most amazing night!" said he, sweeping off his hat to bare his head to the cool nocturnal air.

As his train from the north had missed its connections at Reading he had arrived at the station too late for Lady Coombe's carriage. No doubt they had given him up, or if they had not what did it matter? The house party was busily arriving, and he would not be missed. The walk had been delightful by field, path, and wood, and here he was at the park.

Bannatyne opened the little gate, shut it with a click, turned his back on the plenilune, and strode down the latticed darkness of the avenue. The way was by green-sward betwixt the spreading trees, and the breeze fanned

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him as he moved in this silent wilderness. He had to himself the air of one walking in paradise, an unknown paradise of sweet scents and melodious sounds; a paradise revisited, and strange but yet familiar. When he turned out of the avenue into the paths of the wild garden, he heard the drone of water far away. It came from the Wellingbourne, he remembered, and sighed. How many dusty and silent years ago had he first visited Temple Park! It was ten years since he had fished Gladys out of the pool below the house, and Gladys must be rising fifteen. Bannatyne began to whistle softly an encouraging air. This part of the park was half forest, half garden, and wholly wilderness. Paths of green grass moved through it in various directions to various ends and purposes of their own. They started away joyously, singly, and with a promise of fidelity and sincerity; but presently, belying their faith, would divide shiftily, wander elusively, and treacherously emerge in fastnesses which seemed virgin to the foot of man. The Temple Wilderness was a practical joke on the part of one Coombe now dead and forgotten a hundred years. Its ostensible aim and design was to lead from the upper lodge on the heath to the house in the valley; what it generally did was to lead the trusting wayfarer into remote corners and dump him there hopelessly and helplessly. Let him find his way back if he could. It was his affair. Temple Hall could get on very well without him. It had done so for several generations. Well, if he wanted simple ways and a straightforward path, why had he not entered from the village side, whence the car-

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riage road curved with decent amplitude and by well-trimmed sward to the house? The paths through the wilderness were for those in a mood to mock at fate. They were for Pucks, hobgoblins, elves, Robin Goodfellows, and their congeners. Through brier and bracken, under cover of firs, oaks, beeches, and by long lines of rhododendrons and yews, they made way with the object of getting nowhere. True, if you followed with skill and with the advantages of former knowledge, you might take the right turnings, and so descend by easy happy gradients to the murmurous Wellingbourne below and the hospitality of Temple Hall. This was what Philip Bannatyne was endeavoring to do.

Temple Park was not unfamiliar to him, but the wilderness was baffling of nights. The moon gleamed through the pines, and, when he passed into the open, stared on him coldly and with no appearance of favor. He took two bends of the pathway with easy indifference, and made two divergences with a light heart.

"It goes left here, by jingo," said he to himself, and swung out contentedly upon the trail. But in point of fact that trail was running merrily for the wild and broken wood that faced the heath. He paused after ten minutes, took off his hat again, and inhaled the sweet air.

"A heavenly evening!" he breathed. "'In such a night'—no; I must be calm. I've come here to play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' not 'The Merchant of Venice.' I shall be growing into a real professional. 'In such a night'—I know I've lost my way."

He retraced his steps. The rhododendrons had

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ceased; the aspect of the environing silence was savage; it foreboded and threatened. Philip turned his eyes on it. Feral creatures seemed to peer out of that blackness, where the shadows fell thickly. The bracken had grown somber, dark, mysterious. No longer elves walked and sported here; it was the home and ambush of darker presences.

"I should have turned to the right," said Bannatyne reflectively. "Well, I'll turn to the right now, as I've not yet been eaten." He wandered back in the same lazy mood, enjoying himself, the night, and the engirdling seclusion. No voices spoke in the undergrowth, for the silence of night and midsummer had fallen. But the wind made a continuous whisper overhead, which seemed by its gentle urbanity to emphasize the surrounding solitude, as it were the accompaniment to unheard strains. Bannatyne set his ears to the night and listened for Æolian music, but the murmuring leaves were far above him and the sound of the wind was as the sound of water on a shore, of water lispings as it fell on the sands and seething as it withdrew.

The upper park indeed had some resemblance to the land upon which a sea beat, but it was a sea of greensward. The ridge which was covered by the wilderness was broken into several little bays, up which the wild grass advanced, from which the wild wood receded. On these irregular glades which ran up from the home gardens about the house, and from the serener open spaces of the deer park beyond, the paths of the wilderness at times touched, paused momentarily, and then

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jerked you away round a corner unsuspectingly, but reluctantly, into the cool recesses of the wildwood. Philip Bannatyne knew that he had passed two of these bays or glades, for the moon shining betwixt the promontories of the Wilderness had been white upon these inclosed and wood-locked spaces.

“Confound it! I will break recklessly through,” said he with mock anger, contemplating in his pause the *arrête* of shrubbery which barred his path. “No; on second thoughts I’ll have a cigarette,” he amended, and, lowering himself gently by the way, leaned into the bracken and smoked. It is odd how noises begin to creep out when one makes part of nature. Bannatyne would have sworn that there had been nothing save the wind and the leaves a few minutes before, and now the sounds were infinite. They broke upon the ear in a soft insistent tumult which swelled and ever swelled; and the low octaves of the leaves overhead seemed to recede into the distance. He was taking his place in the underworld where minute things happen, where infinitesimal sounds make their mark, where life is on another scale. The roaring wind has no part in that life; no, not more than in our lives has the cataclysm of the spheres.

But one sound persisted, tinkling in a happy, monotonous, melancholy way upon his senses. The murmur of insects, the blundering buzz of the moth, the creeping and crawling of the bracken—all these converged upon his ears, but irregularly. Something persisted, and it dawned upon him only gradually what it was. He threw away the end of his cigarette and stood up.

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“The moon shines bright; in such a night as this
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees . . .’

“Confusion! I am at it again. But the moonlight has slept sweet upon the bank, and I have heard sweet music.

‘Soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony. . . .’

“It’s water, but it’s not the Wellingbourne, I remember. It’s the fall near the spring, and by that token it makes me not far from the beeches above the turnstile. Let us go.”

With a stave humming on the air, he moved along the pathway now in the direction of the tinkling sound, which emerged gradually into greater significance. Presently it became audible as the splash of water in a basin, and soon after, plunging off the pathway, Bannatyne threaded his way into a little dell, the source of one of the springs that feed the Wellingbourne.

He stood looking for some minutes at the thread of silver light dancing in the eye of the moon, and gleaming and glancing against the soft fronds of the bracken. The night was wonderful; after a scorching day the air came cool through the deeps of the wood; and the memory of that heat made the gushing water grateful to the senses. It fell in a thin stream some ten feet down the face of a rock, dotted with ferns. Bannatyne had an impulse to put his head under it. Had he not done so once years ago to amuse Gladys? He recalled that it had been delightful, as delicious as a shower in Eden

must have been. He had shaken his locks like a dog from the water, and Gladys had shaken with laughter, and almost fallen in again.

He had withdrawn his Panama from his head as he remembered, and bent forward. Yes, it was as delightful as ever. What cool delectable shudders went coursing down the back! Splash, splash, splash fell the stream on the face; he turned his head about with something of the spirit of a gourmet, indulging his appetite to the full and in all aspects, his eyes close-lidded, a modern Epicurean, sunk in sensual enjoyment—temporarily. And all of a sudden he was conscious of receiving a sharp blow in the face.

Bannatyne started, uttered an exclamation and opened his eyes in a mist of water. He was aware now of a low cry of alarm, and through the spray caught the gleam of a white foot hastily withdrawing upward. He blinked and gazed again. What miracle was this from the upper world? Had goddesses descended from their ethereal homes? No; it was only that some one had taken advantage of the grassy knoll above to dangle white naked feet in the falling water. Even as he gazed, his cheek still tingling from the blow, he knew she had fled in a tempest of shame and alarm. Who might it be that haunted that fount? He moved swiftly and almost involuntarily up the rise, and saw a shadow slip furtively between shadows through the wood. It was like a dim ghost that flitted from tree to sheltering tree, or maybe some wood nymph that fled before pursuer, Daphne before Apollo, that bright and bitter god. The shadow

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of the nymph wore the aspect of eager alarm. Bannatyne watched her.

“If I only dared follow!” he murmured. “But I mustn’t, and she will disappear and I shall never know. Life is composed of such disappointments. There’s nothing really in life. It is a blunder and a shame, simultaneously, as the poet observes. Well, there she goes out—out of sight and out of my life. And to think I might have laid the foundation of a romance!”

He turned about, and was descending when he became aware that he was scattered with spray. At that cruel wanton blow he had lost his balance and gone under; the cascade had spread upon him indiscriminately as a shower, and he was uncomfortably moist. As he surveyed himself with a whimsical expression of dismay, his eyes encountered an object on the ground, pale in the moonlight. He stooped and picked it up. It was a rose—the large lemon-white flower of *La Gloire Lyonnaise*. He put his nose to it, and drew in the mystery of the East, the charm of life and love and summer residual in that pungent fragrance.

“A clew,” he remarked cheerfully. “Item, dropped from the bosom of the Dryad.” He paused suddenly, stooped again quickly, and emerged into his full stature as a man with a small shoe in his hand.

“Clew number two,” he said triumphantly. “Cinderella’s slipper, or shoe, Paris-made; item, dropped in her confused flight. She must have clutched them all together when she took fright. Let me see. Perhaps she’s left other things behind. Perhaps she’s left a——”

He scanned the ground carefully for some minutes. "No," he sighed; "that's the tale of them. I must be content with my clews, charmingly insufficient as they are. So that if I meet a beautiful girl with no rose at her breast, and one foot bare, I may be certain of her identity. She belongs to me; she is mine—mine by right of conquest, well, of expiation . . . vengeance. . . . It is the law of the forest."

He put the great rose in his buttonhole and the shoe in his pocket, and resumed his walk. At the next turning of the grassway he paused, for the sound of voices came to him.

"Enter these enchanted woods," said he meditatively, as he listened. "There are more dryads yonder—perhaps mine with them."

He swung about in the direction of the sounds, and went down slowly on a path bordering an open glade in which rose a few great oaks. Under the serene moonlight he could see in the distance a number of forms moving about the checkers of the trees. He hastened his steps, and immediately the frolicsome path dipped away from the glade and plunged deep into the wood. Banatyne stopped, and had almost made up his mind to abandon it and fare forth into the open when his ear was arrested by new voices hard by, seeming to proceed from somewhere ahead of him. He therefore resumed his journey, in the expectation of happening upon others of the house party.

"The wood regularly swarms with dryads," said he. The gleeful path shook itself again, and ran out once

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more upon the margin of the glade, and once more Bannatyne saw the fleeting shadows. The arm of one was raised in a dramatic gesture.

"I'm blessed if they're not rehearsing," thought the young man, and was quickening his steps still further when he heard the noise of something in the bushes on his left, something tearing, and bustling, and rolling among the bushes. He stopped and waited, and a faint voice issued to him.

"Do you mind—? I'm extremely sorry, but I—I can't get up. I'm—I think I'm stuck here."

Bannatyne peered into the tangled shrubbery of nut and ramble and bracken. "Where are you?" he asked anxiously.

"Here," said the faint voice, and it was unmistakably the voice of a woman.

Quite agitatedly, Bannatyne parted the undergrowth and pushed through, guiding himself toward the voice. It was a woman, and it might be . . . No, it was not. He saw that as he gave her his hand, for the malignant moon which should have veiled herself shone deliberately on her, and displayed a stout, elderly woman, with a book in one hand and an anxious expression on her face.

"Thanks so very much," she said without any great show of distress. "I fear I'm a nuisance."

"Not at all," said Bannatyne politely. "Only too delighted to be of assistance to any dryads. If you'll please lean this way I think——"

"That's where the brambles are," explained the stout lady, "I've just leaned that way."

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"Oh, of course, if you've tried—" said he courteously. "Well, can you give me both hands—just so? Never mind the book. Now."

"Please bear in mind I'm sitting in a bramble bush, will you?" asked the stout lady mildly.

Bannatyne promised, and, exerting himself to the utmost, succeeded in extricating her in one wrench. She stood up, smoothed her dress, breathing deeply. "Thank you so much. I don't know whatever I should have done without you." She looked at him. "You're—you're of the house party?" she inquired.

He assented, adding, "My name's Bannatyne."

"Oh!" she said with a little more animation. "Then you're taking the part of *Lysander*. We expected you earlier, and there was a rehearsal called. In fact they're rehearsing now." She pointed up the bank on which they stood.

"Up there?" he asked in wonder.

"Yes," said the stout lady, and nodding toward the glade also. "And out there. You see Lady Coombe wanted the *Oberon-Titania* parts done, and so she's got the glade, and Mr. Ferris was anxious about his part—he's *Demetrius*, you know—and couldn't wait; so we came up here. Oh!" she broke off. "Where's my book?"

Bannatyne stooped and recovered it. "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*," he read.

"Yes, I was reading it when I fell," remarked the stout lady indifferently.

"Fell!" he echoed. "Not—you didn't fall?" He

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looked up the bank, from the top of which voices now came down to them.

"Yes, I got too near the edge and toppled over," said the lady regarding the distance appraisingly. "It *was* rather a long fall, wasn't it?"

"Terrible!" said Bannatyne. "You might have—"

"Oh, but I didn't," she said. "I'm no worse. If you'd come earlier it wouldn't have happened."

Bannatyne bowed prettily. "I'm charmed to think that my timely appearance has impressed you with my resourcefulness and—" But he was interrupted placidly.

"Oh, but it was just *not* timely—that it was not. You see, I was reading your part, Mr. Bannatyne. I was being *Lysander*, and I didn't notice. I had just got to—let me see, where had I just got to? Oh, you know,

'Where art thou, proud Demetrius? Speak thou now . . .
I will be with thee straight.'

And then I went. I don't know what happened to *Demetrius*."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Bannatyne. "I apologize. It was the trains. My dear lady, let me take you back in safety. I will also relieve you of your work. It was unfair to place the job in your hands in this light."

"Oh, I got on pretty well," said the stout lady complacently. "You see, they practically only wanted the cues."

"Talking of cues or clews—" began the young man, and came to an abrupt pause with his hand in his pocket. Instinctively he made a movement as if to inspect his

companion's feet, and then checking himself moved on. She was talking in an everflowing amiable way as they mounted by a circuitous path, and at last they emerged into a ring of rhododendrons.

"They're still going on," observed the lady with a note which was hardly plaintive. "That's Mr. Ferris, and that's Miss Arden. I don't suppose they've missed me."

They emerged into view, but Ferris paid no heed. "Now please, Miss Grant-Summers," he was saying. "Attention. *Theseus*, just drop it a while, please. Now *Hermia*, let's have that over again, if you'll be so kind. We didn't quite get the swing of it. You didn't ring out that abuse as if you meant it. *Helena*—Miss Arden, would you? Thank you; now something like this, *Hermia*:

'O me! you juggler! you canker blossom! You thing of love!'

"Where's *Lysander*, by the way? Anyone seen *Lysander*?"

"Here am I, Mr. Ferris," called out Bannatyne's companion in her faint, easy voice.

"Oh, there you are. I couldn't make out where you'd got to, after that speech. You were supposed to go to sleep, and I suppose you obeyed the directions, eh?" He laughed, obviously without paying any heed in his preoccupation and turned away. "*Helena*, please." There was linked sweetness ending on that musical name. "*Helena*."

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"No, Mr. Ferris," began the stout lady indignantly. "Nothing of the sort. I was just going to sit down when I toppled——"

Philip Bannatyne stared at *Helena*. It was Miss Arden. He stepped forward and examined her feet as she passed.

"Why, it's Mr. Bannatyne," cried Miss Arden.

"How do you do?" said Bannatyne sweetly, with one eye on the ground, for Miss Arden's feet were in shadow. "How delightful to have thought of this theater for rehearsal. That, I suppose, was *your* idea, Miss Arden."

"Oh, dear no," she laughed. "It was Mr. Ferris's. He's awfully keen. He's rehearsing, as you know— But please don't pull me. You'll have me over. I'm sure you don't want my hand so long."

"I beg your pardon," murmured Bannatyne abstractedly. "I was thinking——"

"Now then, *please, Helena*," urged Ferris. Bannatyne dropped the fingers he held and Miss Arden passed on. No; her feet were clad in pretty livery. She was not the dryad. He stood aside and surveyed the scene. *Demetrius* was pleading with *Hermia*. At the farther side of the arena on a wooden bench sat *Theseus* indolently smoking a cigarette and regarding the players moodily. Bannatyne recognized *Theseus*, whom he knew as Captain Madgwick. He left his place and walked across, and saluted his friend.

"Hulloa, old man," said *Theseus* indifferently. "You got down? Know your part?"

"Know it!" echoed Bannatyne. "It has been sing-

ing in my head and my heart as I came through the wood. 'A fool, a fool, I met a fool i' the forest.' "

Captain Madgwick looked at him. "That's not it," he observed. "That's a different play—I forget its name. I know it is because I was turning the page and saw it this morning. Lord, what an awful grind it is getting up these speeches!"

"Is it?" said Bannatyne. "Ah, but then yours is a difficult part—very difficult. More blooming study, Madgwick. I'm afraid you and I are in for it. Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him well, Madgwick. Who is here?"

Theseus regarded him distrustfully. Madgwick was an elegant man with well-trained mustache and a handsome face of the military pattern. The mold in which Captain Madgwick was cast is never broken; it's good looks become monotonous; it has no distinction, not even that which might be claimed for ugliness. Madgwicks are as like as peas or Chinamen; and to amiability they add dullness and impeccability. But *Theseus* looked at Bannatyne with some distrust; he never quite understood him.

"Oh, Lady Fallowfield, and, of course, Hancock, and there's Ferris; and two or three pretty girls, don't you know. Oh, and Peter Bouverie, and a young ass or two Lady Coombe's picked up. And so on."

"Who's *Hermia*?" asked Bannatyne, as a girl swept near him, pitifully weeping.

Captain Madgwick cast him a glance. "Don't you know Miss Grant-Summers?" he asked.

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"No," said Bannatyne deliberately. "But I'm going to," he added with decision. "I'm going to very well. She's my *Hermia*, you know. I think I'll begin at once. It's always a mistake to shirk rehearsals; besides it's bad form. I think I'd better let Ferris know I'm here."

Captain Madgwick's glance rested on him moodily. "Hang it all," he said. "They might have given a fellow a decent part. You've all the fat."

"I shall fail," said Bannatyne, shaking his head; "I have a presentiment I shall fail, and you will step into my shoes. I shall probably die of stage fright, to begin with. Then I shall lose my memory. Lastly, I shall be kicked off in disgrace. Dead men tell no tales."

Theseus uttered a little puzzled guffaw. "You've got the pick of the bunch, Bannatyne," said he. "Miss Grant-Summers takes a lot of beating. And Ferris is so damned interfering. He's nuts on Miss Arden. Can't you hear him cooing to her when he calls? He's practically taken the stage-managing out of Hancock's hands. That's why he got us over here. Look at him hammering away at this scene, not caring a dump about you, just to get the two women to himself. He hasn't called on me for the last half hour."

"*Theseus, Theseus!*" came in Ferris's decisive voice.

"Hulloa, I'm on," said the Captain, struggling to his feet. Bannatyne followed.

"We'll take Act V up to *Pyramus* and *Thisbe*," said Ferris in a businesslike way. "Now then, please, *Hippolyta*."

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"Oh, please wait a minute," said a woman's voice in the dark and the distance. "My dress is caught!"

Bannatyne rushed forward. It was another chance. He might perhaps eliminate one more from the list of possible dryads. He discovered a dim white form bending over a blackberry bush.

"Let me help you," said he pleasantly.

"Oh, if you'd be so good," said a gracious voice. But he could not make out her face in the shadows. Still it would surely be possible to see if she had a bare foot. He disentangled the lace very slowly. Who was this, he wondered, chattering the while.

"I fear it's giving you a lot of trouble," said the lady demurely.

"Delightful trouble," said he heartily.

"Now then, *Hippolyta*!" called the merciless voice of Ferris.

"Coming almost at once," said poor *Hippolyta*.

Bannatyne rose with the liberated skirt. Alas, she was shod. He saw her now in the half light. Tall and queenly she was, with squared shoulders, and white, strong throat. Her form was imperial. She smiled and bowed her gratitude.

"Who's that?" inquired Bannatyne of the stout lady whom he found near him now.

"That's Mrs. Everard Battye," said his companion.

It occurred to him that he should also have asked who his companion was, but he did not. He did not exactly see how he might; and after all it did not matter. She did not seem embarrassed by his ignorance.

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Theseus was addressing the scene in tones of cultured apathy :

“ ‘The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination;
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or, in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush suppos’d a bear.’ ”

“ I say this is rather rot, Ferris,” declared *Theseus*, breaking in on his own soliloquy. “ Can’t I cut some of this? It’s awfully hard to remember.”

“ Why, it’s mostly quotations, man,” said Ferris jocularly.

Theseus mumbled and turned to his *Hippolyta*.

“ They don’t want us,” murmured the stout lady at Bannatyne’s elbow.

“ I’m not sure I don’t want them, or some of them,” said he, frowning. *Hermia* had already passed out of his category of Cinderellas. But *Hermia* was his *Hermia*, and was amazingly handsome, at any rate in the moonlight. He looked across to the glade of oaks under which other shadows were moving. They invited him; they called him. To the attraction of that distant and alluring vision under the visiting moon he could not shut his eyes. No sirens ever sang in the ears of Ulysses as

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danced those figures in his eyes. He sighed, and turned his back on *Hermia*.

"No, they don't want us. They're too businesslike," said he. "Besides some one over yonder may have only one shoe; who knows?"

His companion was still at his side. "Only one shoe!" she said wonderingly.

Bannatyne started. He had forgotten her, for he was mightily self-centered. But he was also ready. He had gauged the stout lady already.

"Yes," he said reflectively, "hope is the last sentiment to abandon the human breast. I am still hoping to find a woman wearing one shoe. I shall go on to my dying day doing so. Some day I'll tell you all about it. Meanwhile I'm going over there."

"I'll go with you," said the lady after a puzzled pause. "Perhaps I can help you to find her."

CHAPTER II

MAINLY ABOUT BOTTOM

BANNATYNE and his new friend passed down the pathway and emerged upon the open, where the moonlight reigned supreme, unchallenged by clouds and undefined by shadows. The white light lay cool upon the grass which was smelling sweet from the recent hay-making; a little way off the great oaks loomed gigantic about the wraiths of men and women that disported there.

"I've got one daughter over here," remarked the stout lady placidly. "I don't know where the other is."

This style of conversation savored of Mr. F.'s aunt, but so wonderful a night hallowed everything, and her remarks might almost seem witty in the general halo of peace, pleasure, and impossibility. Of all the irresponsible people in Temple Park that night, surely this stout lady was the most irresponsible. Bannatyne found himself eying her furtively, and wondering what next would issue from her rag-bag of a mind. She dropped feeble remarks as untidily as a slattern drops hairpins.

"Lady Coombe's *Titania*," she observed.

"A charming *Titania*," said Bannatyne.

"Mr. Bouverie's *Oberon*," she continued.

"Hm—ah—an enviable *Oberon*," said he.

"He ought to do it very well," she rambled on. "Don't you think he's very funny, Mr. Bannatyne?"

"He ought to edit *Punch*," agreed he pleasantly. "Oh, *Oberon* will suit him beautifully."

"They haven't got a *Puck* yet," was the lady's next venture. "Gladys Coombe wanted to do it, but it wasn't—it wouldn't—at any rate Lady Coombe wouldn't have it."

"What a shame!" said Bannatyne. "Dear Gladys is *Puck*, or was a year ago, when I saw her last. She ran at one with her head down like a battering-ram, and took me in——"

"I know—in the stomach," said the lady, her Irish accent emerging a little broadly here. "She's fourteen and thinks she's nine. The only way to disabuse her mind is to put her hair up and her frock down."

"Do you think that would do it?" asked he gravely.

"If it didn't—" began she and broke off. "Here's Kathleen. Kathleen, this is Mr. Bannatyne—*Lysander*, you know. Kathleen's my elder daughter," she confided.

Kathleen, who was fair and whose face beacons excitement, flushed prettily, laughed, and held out her hand. She was a girl of twenty. Bannatyne let his glance go down to her feet. One more must go off the list.

Kathleen's mother must have seen his action, and her mind took up the idea.

"Is there anyone here not wearing boots?" she asked her daughter vaguely.

"Boots!" echoed Kathleen in bewilderment, but Bannatyne hastily intervened.

"In a company of immortals one does not look to find earthly foot gear. What, *Oberon* and *Titania* in

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boots! Perish the thought! Miss Kathleen, you have none. I vow I can see none. They are spirited away. By the way who are you, if I may make so bold? I'm *Lysander*."

"Oh, I'm only one of the fairies," said Kathleen. "Only!" he lifted his hands in deprecation. "Well, fairies don't wear boots or shoes, or indeed anything, so I'm told, and so——"

"Mr. Bannatyne!" said Kathleen's mother with a small protesting giggle, but Kathleen was engrossed in the movements of the players.

"I'm afraid you don't have much to do with me, if you're a fairy," said Bannatyne with a sigh. "I'm handed over to the tender mercies of——"

"You have Miss Grant-Summers," interrupted Kathleen quickly and with significance. She glanced at him questioningly, as if to determine whether he was in earnest.

"Tender mercies of *Puck*," completed he, "and *Puck's* not chosen. I wish Gladys had been *Puck*. Couldn't you be *Puck*, Miss—" He had not yet got the name, but his blurr and hesitation brought him nothing.

Kathleen gave vent to her pretty laugh, and shook her head. "I couldn't take a speaking part. I should die of fright," she declared.

"I don't see how Kathleen could dress that part," observed Kathleen's mother contemplatively eying her daughter.

"Oh, dressing is easy enough. The less you dress the better," said Bannatyne airily.

Kathleen's glance again reverted to the performers. "I think I'm wanted now," she said, and moved off in her graceful way.

"You see, they can't do without her," said Bannatyne. "Let's be audience and claque."

They moved nearer, as he spoke, and came within ear-shot. Into the full moonlight with sprightly step danced a handsome woman of forty, leaning to a meagerness of frame, and breathing deep of her interest and absorption.

"Come, now a roundel, and a fairy song;
Then, for the third part of a minute, hence;
Some, to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds;
Some, war with rear-mice for their leathern wings,
To make my small elves coats; and some, keep back
The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots and wonders
At our quaint spirits: Sing me now to sleep . . ."

"Mr. Hancock," she broke off in a shrill voice. "This will never do. I haven't nearly enough to attend on me."

"My dear Lady Coombe, where can we get 'em from?" replied a little red-and-round faced man perched on a fallen branch of the oak. "We've exhausted all the youth and beauty of town!"

Titania paused irresolutely previous to lying down. "It's a great nuisance," she said fretfully. "We must get some children for *Cobweb* and so on, and I'll wire to the Traverses in the morning. They've got three girls. Well, where did I get to?—oh, yes:

'Then to your offices, and let me rest.'"

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Titania sank gracefully to the earth, enveloped in her expensive white raiment. But she sat up the next moment.

"It's damp, Mr. Hancock; I'm sure it's damp."

"Indeed it isn't," replied the exhausted stage manager. "There's been no rain for a week."

"It's dew then. Really it is, Mr. Hancock. Mr. Bouverie, come and feel."

The Hon. Peter Bouverie moved deliberately from the woman to whom he was talking and obeyed.

"I should advise bracken," he pronounced solemnly.

"Oh, nonsense, we can't wait while you get bracken," declared Hancock. "It's really all right, Lady Coombe."

"I know I shall have the green all over my dress," said she, plaintively surrendering. "Well, now, there's the song."

"We haven't got the song yet," said Hancock. "Lock promised it this morning. But we'll give the cue. 'So good night with lullaby.' Now then, Fairy—"

The glory of the silver night enriched the scene, and shone upon the girl who in obedience to this command emerged from her companions.

"What a court!" murmured Bannatyne. "What a divine riot of beauty! I wish I lived there."

Was it the moonlight that enhanced their looks, or was it the romantic setting? These seemed delicious spirits of the glade, clad in light vesture, wraiths in the dim light, noiseless upon the greensward as they moved. Suddenly Bannatyne remembered the shoe. He pushed forward with inquisitive eyes. The fairies went softly

to and fro; they stooped above *Titania's* head, and then, in answer to the behests of their leader, flitted into the shadows.

“Hence, away; now all is well:
One, aloof, stand sentinel.”

It was not Kathleen's voice, but something even more musical. They were an attractive court, reflected Banatyne, and watched them as they flitted. Apparently they must all go off his list, for all were becomingly shod from Paris.

The Hon. Peter Bouverie now came forward in his deliberate manner and approached the sleeping *Titania*.

“What thou seest, when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true love take . . .”

The incantation was, however, interrupted by the sleeping lady's protest.

“You've squeezed something into my eye, Mr. Bouverie. How horrid of you!”

“Well, it says you have to—it's stage directions,” asserted *Oberon*. “Here it is: ‘Squeezes flower on *Titania's* eye.’”

“What flower have you got?” demanded *Titania* suspiciously, and now sitting up.

Oberon opened his hand. “Only a rose,” said he. “It's the dew. I told you, Hancock, there was dew. Now, it's got into Lady Coombe's eye.”

“I'm very sorry, Lady Coombe, but I can't control the dew. Do let's get on,” said the exasperated stage

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manager. "We shall be here all night. If you'd taken my advice you would have had the rehearsal properly and decorously indoors. But as you haven't—" he shrugged his shoulders. "Fire ahead, Bouverie."

Bouverie proceeded, and Hancock nodded. "Exit," said he.

"Now enter *Lysander* and *Hermia*. Where the deuce is—oh that duffer, Ferris, has taken them over there. I wish some one of you would go over and tell him we're waiting—one of you young ladies . . . Lady Cynthia? Tell him we want *Lysander* and *Hermia* and *Helena*."

"I'm here," said Bannatyne in a tiny voice, as of a schoolboy answering to his name.

"Who's that? That you, Bannatyne?" asked Hancock anxiously. "Glad you've come. Well, now we want *Hermia* and *Helena*. Come along. Run along, Bannatyne."

Bannatyne went forward into the gaze of the company of envioning fairies and players.

"Your cue is 'Vile thing is near,' *Lysander*," Hancock informed him. "Now then we needn't wait. I'll read *Hermia*."

Bannatyne began as he entered the circle:

"'Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood;
And, to speak troth, I have forgot our way . . .'"

He had reached the sleeping Titania now and bent down. "How do you do, Lady Coombe? What a won-

derfully fine idea of yours, this pastoral play. I've been getting up my part all this week. Isn't the ground rather hard? It digs into you, you know, when you've been lying there about three minutes."

Titania sat up with animation. "It's awfully good of you to have come. I thought you might have promised the Cardwells for this week. I *was* glad when I got your wire."

"*Lysander, Lysander!*" called Hancock. "Do for goodness sake get on, man."

"All right, I'm only just . . .

'We'll rest us, *Hermia*, if you think it good,
And tarry for the comfort of the day.'

Hancock gabbled:

"'Be it so, *Lysander*, find you out a bed,
For I upon this bank will rest my head.'

"Er—well—perhaps, we needn't go on just now with that scene," he continued with some hesitation; "*Hermia* isn't here you see, and——"

"I don't quite see how it would improve it if she were here," observed the Hon. Peter, who was looking over the stage manager's shoulder at the prompt book.

"And then we've no *Puck*," said poor Hancock, "and our *Bottom's* deserted us. What the mischief are we to do?" he asked in despair. "We've got the *Titania-Bottom* scenes just coming on." He raised his voice: "Lady Coombe, do you think you are sure of getting that supply of children for the *Cobwebs* and *Peas—Blossoms*?"

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"What, Mr. Hancock?" cried *Titania* shrilly from where she was talking with Bannatyne. "Oh, yes, positive, I'm promised them to-morrow by the rector. But I wish you'd settle *Bottom*, Mr. Hancock. We can't do without *Bottom*, and I particularly ought to have a voice in it." She made her way toward the stage manager, and Bannatyne followed.

"What's become of *Bottom*?" he inquired.

"Bolted," said Peter Bouverie, removing the cigar from his mouth. "Took the bit in his teeth this morning and bolted. He talked about Norway, but I don't think he'll really ever come back. He only talked that way not to alarm us."

Bouverie, between forty and fifty, dark of face, smooth shaven, and large of feature, looked out of twinkling gray eyes on Bannatyne. He was big and imperturbable, and he had a sense of the humorous. So too had Bannatyne, but in a livelier and less deliberate form. He gravely encountered Bouverie's eyes.

"Is it so bad as that?" he asked.

"My dear fellow," said Bouverie, examining his cigar, "I would offer to play *Bottom* myself, only I'm *Oberon*, a much more important person. I've suggested to Hancock that he should take the part, but his reply, I regret to say, was improper. I can't repeat it before gentlemen."

"There are one or two ladies we could get," suggested Bannatyne.

"That remark, Bannatyne, is hardly worthy of you," said Peter. "I was going on to suggest that *Bottom*

would suit you, and now I'm sure of it. You shall take *Bottom*, and we'll give *Lysander* to one of the youths."

"But, my good man, I've learned my part," said Bannatyne in despair. "I've got it up by rote, and it took me five solid days of work. I've never worked so hard since I ate my dinners."

"If you'd only come into Parliament, there might be some chance of saving you," said the Hon. Peter; "but you're a thoroughpaced, lazy poltroon, and I've done with you."

He turned on his heel as he spoke, only to be clutched by Lady Coombe, who had been engaged in excited argument with Hancock.

"Mr. Bouverie, do protect me. Here's Mr. Hancock saying he can't get on without *Bottom*, and he's going to give it to young Mr. Lock."

"Well, it's either that or a professional from town," said Hancock moodily. "It's all Valance's fault. What on earth did he mean by turning turtle at the last moment?"

"Valance was afraid of his own responsibilities," said Peter Bouverie.

"But Mr. Lock really is no good," protested Lady Coombe plaintively. "You've no idea how unsuitable he is."

"He's better than Walrond or Gay," said Hancock grumpily. "The only other thing to do is to reshuffle the parts, and I daren't face the outcry there'd be."

"I propose Bannatyne," called out Peter Bouverie. "Anyone second him?"

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"I'd second him if he'd take it on," said Hancock doubtfully. "And then we could make Lock or Walrond *Lysander*."

Bannatyne sat down desperately on the fallen branch. "I have already explained," he began with polite irony, "to Mr. Bouverie, my friend on the left, that it has taken me a week to 'get up' *Lysander*. Now so far as my elaborate calculations go, Mr. Hancock, the play is fixed for Thursday next in the interests of that delectable charity, the Cottage Hospital. If I am right in my subtraction that gives me just three days. Otherwise I would have embraced *Bottom*," he concluded with a courteous wave of his arm which embraced, among other things, *Titania*.

"Well, then Lock it must be," said Hancock with decision. "He's the only one left to us. It's Hobson's choice. I only trust he's a quick study."

"He'll ruin it," declared Lady Coombe dramatically. "I'm sure he can't act. Look at him. Think of his hair!"

"That might be cut," said Bouverie reflectively.

"But his face!" cried Lady Coombe.

"As thin as a lath," said Bouverie. "I confess I don't see him roaring like the lion. Besides, he's orchestral manager. He can't do both. Couldn't I double the parts of *Oberon* and *Bottom*, Hancock?"

"My dear fellow, . . . don't be absurd. When both of you are on the stage at the same time!"

"No; I'm blest if we are."

"Act IV, Scene I," said Hancock scornfully. "This

all comes of rehearsing without a *Bottom*. *Bottom* and *Titania* sleep while you enter. Then there's the business of waking the Fairy Queen."

"Oh, I'd forgotten," said Bouverie humbly. "Well, we haven't got any choice, as you say. We fall back on Oliver Lock. There's nothing in the orchestra business, although he likes to think there is. We shall do very well with a comb and tissue paper, and some girl at the piano. What's the use of Lock waving a baton and making all that pretense?"

"Is Lock over there, Bannatyne?" called Hancock. "Any of you ladies seen Mr. Lock?"

A chorus of noes greeted him.

"He's probably indoors," said Bouverie. "None of those youths came out to-night. They're too old for this sort of thing."

"Well, we shan't get him to-night," said poor Hancock. "So we'd better give up the notion at once. Is *Hermia* coming over, Lady Cynthia? Oh, I say, let's have them all over, and we can do that other act. Look sharp now. Where's *Philostrate*? I say, Burton, bring that crowd over like a good chap, will you? Ferris is bent on wrecking this show with his airs. Takes off all my women, and——"

Bannatyne slipped away and overtook Bouverie.

"Give me your solemn word of honor to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, Peter," said he.

Bouverie eyed him. "I swear," he said after a pause.

"Then have you noticed anything peculiar about any of the women's feet to-night?"

Peter Bouverie paused. "No," said he. "But I've noticed something peculiar about your head."

"What's the matter with my head?" demanded Bannatyne.

"It's cracked," said Bouverie sadly.

"No, it isn't really," pleaded Bannatyne. "I will explain some day. The hour will come when I shall be free from my self-imposed vow of silence. But in the meantime, you've not seen anything odd about the girls' feet?"

Bouverie's face wrinkled with thought. "I noticed Miss Merrington limping a little," he said. "No doubt it's corns; she wears extra tight boots."

"No, I don't mean corns," said Bannatyne impatiently.

"Well, I haven't seen any of their feet to-day," said Peter apologetically. "If I'd known you were anxious I'd have asked Gladys——"

Bannatyne clapped his hands. "Eureka! I've got it!" he cried. "I thank thee, Peter, for teaching me that word. Gladys! The imp of mischief! Of course, Gladys. I ought to have guessed it. But tarry a little; there is something more. Gladys confesses to fourteen and could——"

"Is it still bad?" inquired the Hon. Peter solicitously.

"Oh, go away, Peter," said he. "I'm going on a mission of my own. You don't understand anything about it—not the least little bit. Where's Gladys?"

"If she weren't Gladys, I should have said in bed, where she ought to be. But being Gladys, I should not care to guess."

"Is that your idea of the duties of a godfather?" asked Bannatyne contemptuously. "I wash my hands of you, Peter. Also, I will complain to her mother."

He turned as he spoke and walked off. "Lady Coombe," said he, extricating her attention from another altercation with Hancock. "I demand to know where Gladys is? Her cruel godfather has handed his responsibilities over to me. He washes his hands of her, and I wash mine of him."

"Gladys?" said *Titania* distractedly. "Oh, yes, Gladys is in bed—no, she's—I think I saw her somewhere about just now. She's— Is Gladys over there?" she called wildly to some figures under the oak.

"No, Lady Coombe," came back the answer.

"She's somewhere," said *Titania* helplessly, and invaded the enemy, Hancock, again.

"Gladys for a wager," said Bannatyne to himself. "Where the mischief is that mischief? I'd better look her up."

He turned about and began to go across the glade to the scene of his meeting with the stout lady. Probably Gladys was with the other party. Hancock, noticing his movements, hailed him.

"I say, Bannatyne, hurry up that crowd over there," he implored. "It will be midnight ere we've started."

"All right," called back Bannatyne. When he was halfway across he saw, on glancing back, that he was

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being followed—and by a woman. He therefore courteously waited, and presently was joined by the stout lady of middle age, who nodded to him in a friendly manner.

“I’m going for my daughter, Chloe,” she said, the slight brogue showing in her abbreviation of the possessive.

“I’m sure many people would do that in respect of a young lady with such a pretty name,” said he. “And as I also am going for a young lady, let us join forces. You find Miss Chloe, and I’ll find Miss Gladys.”

“Is it Gladys you’re after?” said his companion. “I saw Gladys jumping over the rhododendrons with Mr. Fanshaw an hour ago.”

“Ah!” said Bannatyne, making a mental calculation. “Then that would have been just before,” he said aloud. “She got hot, I suppose, the minx!”

“I don’t wonder at anyone getting hot this weather,” said the lady. “It’s enough to—” But here the party from the shrubbery met them and they were drowned in the advancing tide.

“I didn’t know you were here, Bannatyne, till just now,” said Ferris heartily. It was clear he was feeling triumphant and important. “How are you? I say, do you know Miss Grant-Summers? No, I fancied not. She’s *Hermia*, you know, so the sooner you know her the better. Let me. Miss Grant-Summers . . .”

Bannatyne murmured something about having heard of Miss Grant-Summers, and the pleasure of meeting her; and she laughed sweetly.

"I fear you'll find me an awful stick," she declared, sweeping him, as he was conscious, with her dark eyes.

"As for me you'll have to pull me up from the ground. I shall be rooted," said he as extravagantly. Miss Grant-Summers was amazingly handsome; but *Theseus* got her the next moment, and he fell out of the group.

"I can't see Chloe and I can't see Gladys," observed an even voice in his ear.

He started. Now who was this? And why had he not managed to find out her name? She stuck like a burr. He offered his arm.

"We'll go in search of them," said he. "I suppose they're lost in the woods."

"I hope not," she said, taking his arm. "Do you mind really? Going up this steep is pretty—" she gasped, and when they had mounted the rise, stopped and withdrew her arm. "Chloe's probably gone to the house. She's a fairy, too, and she hasn't anything to say. She's probably gone back, and Gladys too."

"Then we'll go back too," he suggested.

"But you—" she protested. "You've got to rehearse over there. They will be waiting."

"Oh, I haven't anything to say either," he declared. "Hancock will probably say it for me . . . among other things," he added pensively. "The fact is, I can't leave my quest. I've taken on the duties of godfather."

The lady stared at him without understanding and with hardly any interest.

"There's a nice, short way to the house over here,"

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she remarked. "Sir Edward Coombe showed it to me to-day."

"Hum!" said Bannatyne doubtfully. "Don't you think we'd better go by the path through the glade?"

"Oh, but this is much shorter," said his companion. "It just goes over that slope and down to the right, and through a gate, and you're there."

Bannatyne eyed the wood before them with misgivings. An hour or two ago he would have claimed an intimate acquaintance with Temple Park. In this bewildering moonlight he had his doubts.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Certain," said the lady. "Sir Edward brought me up this evening by it. I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Bannatyne," she interrupted herself suddenly. "Gladys and my Chloe have both gone back with Sir Edward."

"That's a solution as reasonable as desirable," he averred. "Well, let us follow them with a brave heart. May I have your arm again? Thanks so much. *Itur in antiquam silvam.*"

CHAPTER III

ITUR IN ANTIQUAM SILVAM

THE lady who had chosen to associate herself with Bannatyne walked on for some little time in a silence which he respected, since it seemed to be a brooding silence. She spoke in the middle of a long lane of rhododendrons.

"Mr. Bannatyne, do you think Shakespeare improper?"

"Improper?" he repeated critically, as if weighing the word.

"Yes; don't you think he's rather— You see, I've just had to read your part."

"Oh, I hope there's nothing improper in my part," he said hurriedly. "I would never forgive Lady Coombe if there were. She has no right to compromise me, and I'm sure she wouldn't."

"No, I didn't mean your part exactly," said his companion, "though there are bits—but I meant other places."

"Oh, do you mean that terrible place beginning——"

"No, I don't mean that, I don't think," interposed the lady. "I mean—well, I meant generally."

"Generally, I think Shakespeare ought not to be read—certainly not acted," said Bannatyne firmly.

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The lady looked at him doubtfully. "I'm glad Kathleen and Chloe haven't speaking parts," she said at last with a sigh of relief. "They wanted to very much. Indeed, Chloe was quite upset about it. The child was so absurd, you know, Mr. Bannatyne; she wanted to play *Puck*. Of course she's only eighteen. But it was impossible. She doesn't realize, poor girl. But it wouldn't do at all. *Puck's* language is so extravagant. Besides, as you said, the dress. We go this way, now," she interrupted herself to say. "There's a big yew tree I remember. Not but what she could have played the part very well—Chloe is so awfully clever. And it would have suited her figure, too. She's very slight and boyish. She could have worn short skirts below the knee and a wand, couldn't she? Now which way do we go?"

She had come to a pause at a division of the path, and seemed to appeal to him. The moon, declining, was rolling westward through the straight and naked pines. Bannatyne looked toward the right and then northward.

"The house is down there," he said.

"Oh, yes, now I know—this way," said his companion with confidence, and they swerved to the right. She resumed presently with an informal air of abstraction: "Do you admire full or slim figures, Mr. Bannatyne?"

"I do," said Bannatyne promptly. "Very much."

The lady looked perplexed. "But I meant—" she began and suddenly stumbled. Bannatyne caught her.

"Thank you so much," she said, and stared before her. "I don't remember this," she declared vaguely. "I don't think we came this way with Sir Edward."

Bannatyne's misgivings had been justified. He came forward to take command. "There's a dell down there," said he. "There ought to be a road out of it, and this leads into it. Suppose we venture?"

"Oh, but are you sure you know the road?" inquired his friend with some anxiety.

This was turning the tables with a vengeance, but he did not remind her that she had started as the guide.

"All roads lead to home," he said flippantly.

"Well, I shall trust to you entirely," she said with whole-hearted confidence.

Bannatyne descended alertly, and with his assistance the lady followed. The dell, being in a bottom between two rises, was in darkness, for the moon did not penetrate here, and so it was difficult to determine on a proper direction. But he made up his mind eventually, and led up a rough path which seemed to climb as was desired. This brought them into a labyrinth of nut trees over which the light shone but faintly, and through which they wended their way with some effort. The path was overgrown and the lady complained that the branches scratched her face.

"Only a little farther," said he encouragingly, but by this time his doubts had increased, and in a little while it became clear that whatever chance they had had of striking the pathway to the house had vanished. They were moving in the upper wilderness now and probably plunging deeper into its recesses. The moon had completely vanished, wrapt in clouds, and the darkness was profound.

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"I really can't walk any farther," said the lady with a sigh.

"If we go a little farther we can get out upon the heath," explained Bannatyne, "and then we're all right."

"But we shall have to walk all that way to the lodge by the road," she protested in dismay.

Bannatyne admitted the situation.

"Very well," she said desperately, and walked on again.

By this time conversation had dropped, for the lady was too weary and too hot, and Bannatyne began to feel the responsibilities of his position. He seemed to himself a pioneer seeking his fortune in desert places.

"If she wasn't so stout," he said to himself, "it wouldn't be so bad. As it is, I'd sooner have—well, *Hermia* or *Kathleen*."

But for lack of these he kept his company, and at last bethought him of his part; it would while away the time to repeat it. He did so for some time under his breath, but presently the sound emerged into the open.

"Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing, let loose."

The startled lady uttered a cry of dismay.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried. "I haven't——"

"I was only rehearsing," he explained. "Forgive me. I didn't mean to break out. I was thinking of Miss Grant-Summers."

The lady sank in a heap. "I really can't go any farther," she gasped. "I'm so hot."

"But we must go on—we can't stay here all night," said Bannatyne anxiously. "It can't be much farther."

"You go on, then, and leave me here," said the lady.

"I cannot leave you to starve," said he gallantly.

"But can't you come back?" said she with a touch of asperity for the first time in her good-natured voice.

"Please leave me, and when you've found the way and I've rested we can go on."

"That's not a bad notion at all," said Bannatyne.

"Let me arrange this bracken for you, and I'll leave you. There it is. Now you won't be afraid."

"My dear man, I'm not afraid of anything with or without legs," said she good-humoredly, the brogue apparent now. "Just mind your own business, which is to find the way out."

"Very well," assented he. "Like *Puck*, I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes."

"Oh, don't be so long as that," said she.

"I won't," he promised, and was leaving when she uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It's so fortunate," said the lady. "There's a tiny little trickle here and quite a pool of water. It'll cool my face." She dabbed her handkerchief in it. "Now get along, like a good man, for I want to take off my boots."

"Take off your boots!" echoed Bannatyne, coming back, arrested by a flashing thought. "Did you say, 'Take off your boots'?"

"Yes, I did," returned she. "You don't want to see me do it, do you?" she asked with good humor.

"N-no," said Bannatyne confusedly. "I was only thinking—I was thinking of something else. Well, good-by. God rest you and be patient."

He slipped into the darkness ahead, and was lost to sight. The silence now was even greater than that which had accompanied him on his former expedition, but he went at a swifter pace, since he was no longer impeded by his faltering companion.

"In such a night," said he to himself, "I ought to have had the company of some white and beauteous distressed damsel, and not—a stout lady of fifty who wants to take off her boots."

But the word "boots" had been effective; round swung his memory to shoes. It was the second occasion that this divestment had happened, and he was associated with both. He wondered, as he wandered, how he might contrive to discover the owner of the shoe he felt for now in his pocket. He looked at his coat. Yes; the rose was still there in all its glory. He took it out and buried his nose in the fragrance, and seemed somehow to receive encouragement and inspiration.

"These woods are bound up with my fate," he assured himself. "What a night! Oh, what a night!" He paused and the breath of the evening came up from the valley. "We shall have to abandon the paths and plunge headlong down there, at the last extremity," he thought. "Heavens! What a task! She will die by the way, or get caught in the undergrowth, or be cut in pieces by the brambles, or—" Imagination could follow no farther that way. He tried pleasanter thoughts. Was it possible

to run to earth the Dryad? But perhaps she was only a village maiden who had stolen close to observe the party from the Hall. Perhaps she was not even good-looking. No one had appeared to lack a shoe, unless, of course, it was Gladys. Probably it was Gladys, and then—oh, well, the fun was gone. Gladys was too young to play *Cinderella*, though she might play *Puck*. So Miss Chloe had wanted to play *Puck*. Slim and white eighteen had— Stay, was Chloe the Dryad? Would not that explain her disappearance? She was probably at the Hall, seeking a new pair of shoes. She——

He pulled up. Three paths crossed in a tangle. Which was he to take? He remembered he had already taken two turnings almost recklessly. And now the choice was thrust on him again. Providence, Destiny, Fate, was behaving like a rogue, like *Puck*, in short. *Puck* seemed to possess these woods. He was tempted to spin a coin and trust to luck, not *Puck*; but discretion is the better part of valor, and he hesitated. The affair was getting beyond the boundaries of a joke, and he had left a poor lady in the heart of the Wilderness, awaiting his return and succor. He chose very carefully, and went on his way whistling.

“If it goes down, I shall come up,” he said to himself. “The only chance is the heath now.”

Well, to pass the time, he had better resume his part. He began. The moon shone again brightly, striking deeper shadows. He looked at his watch and found it eleven o'clock.

“These woods are bewitched,” said he. “I shall yet

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come across the real *Titania* and *Cobweb* and *Mustardseed*. How does that part go? Let me conceive Miss Grant-Summers hanging on my arm.

“‘How now, my love! Why is your cheek so pale?’”

He declaimed the line with feeling, and, as he did so, turned a corner. Before him stood a figure, dim like a ghost in the twilight, and poised in the act of flight with amazed alarm. Bannatyne's voice died and his step faltered. He could make out now that this was a young girl of a slim suppleness, and that she was in white muslin, and hatless. He guessed at her looks, but then the background was ravishingly romantic.

“Please, can you tell me the way out?” he said, hat in hand.

She gave a little sigh of relief, as of one realizing that the peril was past.

“Yes, easily,” she said quickly. “I've just come up from the park. It was so beautiful! It's only just along here.”

“Thank you so much, if you would,” said Bannatyne. “It would be a great mercy. I've been wandering in this wood for several days. I am really a disembodied spirit by now.”

She laughed faintly. “It is a perplexing place,” said she, with demure distance in her voice. “I've lost myself more than once, when I didn't know it so well. I believe Sir Edward Coombe's great-grandfather made the Wilderness as a joke.”

“If I remember aright, he was fond of practical

jokes," said Bannatyne. "Didn't he construct a bathing pool you couldn't get out of?"

"Did he?" She laughed with that irrepressible laugh that comes of natural gayety and is tempered by convention.

"Yes; they filled it in, in favor of the present much less romantic pool. You know it?"

"Oh, yes, I've bathed there—this morning," she added.

"And I was stifling in a train," said he, sighing.

She walked on in silence for a minute or two, obviously thinking out a new topic of conversation. She was very young, Bannatyne decided, and she was demurely pretty, he could see. They went down a path through which the moon struck, turning it into a lane of light. On each side the bushes were wrapped in luminous darkness. Shadows of pearl moved in the silence, and the great masses of the bracken were spectral gray.

"I suppose you're staying at the Hall?" said Bannatyne presently, as she did not find her voice.

"Oh, yes," she answered, and then, hesitatingly, "and you, too?"

"If we ever get there, yes," he assented. "My name's Bannatyne."

"Oh, *Lysander*!" she ejaculated impulsively.

"*Lysander*," he admitted. "And you?"

"Oh, I haven't any part—at least it's of no consequence," said the girl. Suddenly remembrance came to Bannatyne, and he peered over and down at the earth.

"What's the matter?" asked his companion. "Is there anything?"

"Nothing of consequence," he assured her. "I was only looking. May I tie up my lace? I think it's got loose."

She stopped without speech, and he knelt and fumbled ostentatiously with his boots. Now that he was on this level he could make out in the dimness what he wanted. Alas! another hope had disappeared. This was not the Dryad; she wore sensible walking boots. He felt he would become an expert in foot gear presently. Murmuring his apologies, he got up. The Dryad was a humbug. She was only Gladys, after all. As he rose, his companion, who had been considering in her demure way, said:

"My name is Merrington."

Of course, it was tit for tat, confidence for confidence, but he was no wiser.

"Of course," he said gracefully. "And an excellent goddess of the machine Miss Merrington is to a poor benighted wayfarer. Hark! is that the stream?"

They halted, and Miss Merrington, after a moment or two of examination, showed signs of embarrassment. "I—I," she began tremulously, "I really think we must have gone past the place. I don't remember these chestnuts."

As she spoke his nostrils were filled with the strong scent of the Spanish chestnut blossom.

"Oh!" he said with dismal cheerfulness. "Then suppose we go back?"

"I think perhaps we ought to," she said reluctantly. "I remember the turning quite well. It was near a rhododendron."

"My dear Miss Merrington," he groaned, "I've been walking by rhododendrons for three weeks, as near as I can make out."

"I'm awfully sorry," she said penitently, and, as there was no more to be said, they retraced their steps. They walked a hundred yards and came to a cross path, and here they had an argument. Bannatyne maintained that they had come along the lower path; Miss Merrington that they had come by the upper.

"I remember the yews," said he stoutly.

"I remember the pines," said she as firmly.

"Well, *Puck* has us again," he concluded with a sigh.

"*Puck*!" she echoed in wonder.

"Yes, Robin Goodfellow has been guiding me all this evening. He's rare sport. He's given up housewives and other silly work, and has taken to the play. He's rehearsing, too. Don't you know he has to lead me a dance with *Demetrius*? He's begun too soon. I suppose he's been stage-struck; all that rehearsing over yonder has got into his head. I wonder where the mischief he is. I'd like to——"

He stopped as his glance fell on Miss Merrington. "I don't know, though. It isn't bad fun, is it?"

"What isn't?" she asked in perplexity.

"Oh, being lost," he answered.

"But we're not lost," she declared firmly. "I'm quite sure——"

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"I've been lost all the evening," he said recklessly, "and I'm now beginning to like it."

But she was looking in dismay at a track that had emerged stealthily and noiselessly on their right. "I—I don't seem to remember this," she stammered.

It was true, then; he *was* lost once more. But the company was different this time.

"What does it matter?" he said joyfully. "*Puck* is at it again. He's made another mistake, that's all. You know he mistook *Lysander* for *Demetrius*. Well, now he's mistaken you for—for *Hermia*, I suppose. I'm quite content."

He hummed an air, and struck at the leaves with his stick; but the girl did not share his complacency.

"I am afraid—I've led you—I think we must have gone wrong," she said nervously. "I could have been positive about the path, because I only came in a little way just to—well, I just ran in and some one was waiting for me."

Bannatyne looked at her gravely. "Then you are *Hermia*," he said. "Some one told me her name was Miss Grant-Summers, but that was an invention. You ran away from *Demetrius*, the brute, and have found the real *Lysander*. *Puck* has not blundered this time."

"Oh, but I didn't run away from anyone," she stammered, and he knew she blushed. "I only—that is, I meant to go back. I just came in to—to see how the moonlight—" She did not finish.

"Well, how does it?" he asked nonchalantly. Bannatyne sat down as he spoke, but she remained standing.

"You take this too seriously, Miss Merrington. It is all in the night's work. If you are *Hermia*, it's obvious the best thing we can do is to go through our parts in the forest."

"But I'm not *Hermia*," she protested. "I'm only a fairy."

"A fairy is quite good enough for me," he said indulgently. "It ought to be good enough for anyone. And as there doesn't seem any chance of getting anywhere in particular, I beg to propose that we don't try, but just sit here till some one comes to us."

"Oh, but we mustn't—we can't—it's getting late," urged the fairy in distress.

"Do you admire my rose?" he asked inconsequently.

Miss Merrington moved a little nearer, and he made room for her on the bank. She sat down reluctantly.

"It's very beautiful," she said at last. "Did you get it off that bush on the little lawn?"

"No," he said thoughtfully, "I didn't, but it came from there, of course. Perhaps the gardener would know," he added, musing aloud.

"The gardener!" said the girl. "But how can we find him?"

"Oh, he must find us," he declared airily.

"But—but we can't stay here until he does," she suggested diffidently.

"Why not?" he asked indolently, for he had begun to tire. "And if he never comes, we have a peaceful death in store. We shall be like the babes in the wood, and the

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robins will cover us. They begin to sing next month. I wonder if a sleep would refresh us."

Miss Merrington jumped to her feet hastily. "I am going on," she declared.

He rose deliberately. "Well, I trust to your guidance," he said with a sigh.

"That isn't fair; oh, that isn't generous!" she said, with a little display of spirit.

He considered. "No, I don't think it was. But, you see, I have a companion on my mind."

"A companion!" she repeated.

"Yes; I abandoned my partner in misfortune to find the way."

"Oh, how sickening for him!" she said.

"Oh, I think she'll be all right," he declared easily.

"She!" Miss Merrington was silent. She began to go slowly along a path. "Who was it?" she asked presently.

"I have no earthly idea," he confessed. "But she was charming beyond usual. She lost me."

"She lost you!"

"Yes, just as you—I mean, of course, I lost her."

Miss Merrington was silent again, and they went on for ten minutes in this fashion. The moon was full in their faces.

Miss Merrington at last came to a halt once more. "This is worse than ever," she averred in a melancholy voice. "We seem to be getting higher, instead of lower."

"There's no getting over it," said Bannatyne. "We shall have to camp out. After all, it is only the real

thing. *Hermia* and *Lysander* did. They pillowed their heads——”

“I’m *not Hermia*,” said Miss Merrington crossly.

Bannatyne looked at the imperturbable moon.

“Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,” he quoted.

Miss Merrington turned on him with petulance.

“Oh, you don’t seem to see how serious it is!” she cried.

“We are quite lost!” and here she burst into tears.

Bannatyne was at once in quite another mood. He soothed her. “Now, do sit down one moment, while we consider,” he said. “There’s nothing like two heads for puzzling out problems. That’s right. The moon is there—that’s the west; the house must therefore be there—that’s the north. If we abandon the paths we can pick our way down through the bracken to the open park pretty easily. Are you game? Of course your dress——”

“I don’t mind a bit about my dress,” said the tearful fairy, drying her eyes.

“That’s right; and now, if you’re rested, we’ll be starting.”

The girl rose, and came to him lithely. Now that he saw her in that fullness of light she was overyoung—not more than eighteen. He took her hand and put her arm in his.

“We will go, ‘thorough bush, thorough brier,’” he said. “Isn’t that your part?”

“No,” she said weakly, but yielding herself to him.

“That’s Lady Cynthia’s. I don’t speak at all.”

“What a shame!” he said, and was leading the way into the rough wood. But she was comforted now by his

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masterfulness, and the reaction from her own fears. She looked upon the crisis as at an end.

“ I did want to play *Puck*, but, of course, they wouldn't let me,” she said timidly.

“ *Puck*,” he echoed, brought up suddenly by a recollection. “ You wanted to play— Why, then——”

But he was interrupted by a human voice, by a shout that rang in the woods.

“ Miss Merrington! Miss Merrington!”

“ Mr. Walrond!” she exclaimed excitedly. “ It's Mr. Walrond. He's found me!”

CHAPTER IV

CHLOE

MISS MERRINGTON withdrew her arm and made a rush toward the voice.

"This is 'most intolerable, and not to be endured,'" said Bannatyne to himself. "Who is this cockerel?"

A shadow emerged and fell on the pathway, and it was the shadow of a young man. Bannatyne followed the girl in her flight.

"Oh, thank goodness, you've come, Mr. Walrond!" She was gasping with fervor.

"I add my indebtedness," said Bannatyne with a bow.

An eyeglass dropped from the young man's face as he examined the speaker. It was as if he asked audibly, "Who the deuce are you?"

"I nearly gave you up," said he, pointedly ignoring Bannatyne. "I say, did you lose your way?"

"Yes," said she. "Wasn't it foolish of me? I seemed only to have gone about a hundred yards, and I was certain I could find my way, and then I met this—Mr. Bannatyne, and he'd lost his way; and then—well, I got fearfully muddled, and we were in despair."

Mr. Walrond inserted his eyeglass again. "An awful nuisance, losing your way," he said languidly.

Bannatyne judged him to be about four-and-twenty, and he was certainly very conscious of himself. But

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what he might be under that heavy veil of awkward vanity he could not say. Perhaps he was a very decent fellow. Anyhow, it was best to go on that assumption to start with.

"Well, now we're in safe hands at last," said Bannatyne, sighing his relief audibly. He took off his Panama, as if with content. "Is it far?" he asked.

"No; the park's just below," said Mr. Walrond. "It's only these beastly cross-paths. But they're really pretty easy when you know them. It's down here, Miss Merrington. Allow me."

He offered her his assistance in a determined manner as he spoke, and she accepted it. They turned down a smaller track which Bannatyne had not noticed.

"You seem expert," said he to their guide.

"Well, I ought to be," said the young man, adjusting his neat Trilby hat. "Look out for these ruts, Miss Merrington; they're awfully treacherous in this light. Best lift your feet well."

It was true. Bannatyne was rocking and reeling in the path behind them; but Walrond now had Miss Merrington's arm firmly in his. It was a reversal of conditions which did not appeal to Bannatyne. The fairy was being ravished from him. "Would you mind not going quite so fast?" he pleaded. "I can't quite see my way," for the moonlight did not enter these close precincts.

"Sorry," said the young man, and paused momentarily and perfunctorily with his slender charge, and then went on.

Bannatyne heard the undertones of a conversation in

front, and to his suspicious ears it sounded intimate. "Awfully cruel of you." . . . "Waited half an hour." . . . "You needn't have . . . I didn't mean . . ."

It was exasperating. He had played the first rôle up till now, and here he was left to trail behind as he liked, of no significance, while lovers babbled together under his nose, unheeding. Flirtation such as that was effrontery; it was unblushing. Who the mischief was Walrond with his airs? He thought of demanding an answer to this haughty question. The cooing of the doves was unendurable. The murmur went down the path before him. Suddenly a flash of remembrance lit up his mind. He hailed them.

"Would you mind stopping a little, please? I—I've lost some one."

Walrond stopped, and Miss Merrington, hanging on his arm, stopped also, and both turned their heads. They had evidently almost forgotten his existence, he reflected bitterly. He could just see them through the gloom in that association of propinquity.

"Lost some one!" echoed the young man vaguely.

"Yes, I've lost a lady," explained Bannatyne. "I've just remembered her. I came to find the way out, which through the good fortune of meeting you I have done."

"Of course, there's your lady," observed Miss Merrington.

"Where is she?" inquired Walrond.

"I don't think I know," answered Bannatyne truthfully. "But she's somewhere up near the heath, waiting for me." He paused, as if inviting an offer of assistance,

but none came. It was clear that the news was not welcome to Mr. Walrond. "I must get hold of her some way."

"That's all very well," said this implacable guide. "But unless you can say where she is, how can we get to her? Who is it?"

"She's a stout lady of maturity," said Bannatyne slowly, "who wears a dress, if my eyes mistook not, of a green substance, inserted with white lace, and a rather too large picture hat, and she has an Irish accent."

"Lady Merrington!" said the young man.

"Mamma!" cried Miss Merrington simultaneously.

"Then you're Miss Chloe, of course," said Bannatyne, as facts forced themselves together of a sudden in his mind. "I've been hearing quite a lot about you."

"The point is," interposed young Walrond bluntly, "how are we to find Lady Merrington? We'll go back, Miss Merrington," he went on addressing his companion with the air of excluding and ignoring Bannatyne, "and look her up. I know these woods like my A B C, and we'll soon find her."

This was sheer braggadocio; and, besides, it was useless. Bannatyne took a hand.

"I think, if you don't mind, as Miss Merrington is naturally tired with her wanderings, I will take her home, and you can go in search of Lady Merrington more expeditiously, and without encumbrances."

The suggestion seemed to bewilder Mr. Walrond; he struggled with his politeness, but civility won. Moreover, this audacity gave him pause.

"Well, you see, I couldn't go alone, because I wouldn't know her whereabouts," he said. "We'd better all go."

"That will be nicer," agreed Bannatyne. "Of course, if Miss Merrington is not too tired," he added.

"Oh, I'm not tired," she assured him coldly. "Poor mamma!"

There seemed to Bannatyne to be some reproach in this, which he did not consider just.

"Whereabouts did you leave her, do you think?" asked Walrond.

Bannatyne considered. "Well, it was much higher than this, I'm sure," he said; "and I came down from it by about ten different paths. And it was near some beeches, I think, and— Oh, yes, she was sitting in a pool of water."

"Sitting in a pool!" cried Miss Chloe indignantly. "How could you?"

"Well, she wanted to," said Bannatyne weakly. "I left her dabbling in it. She was going to take off——"

"It's no good talking," interrupted Miss Chloe firmly. "We've just got to act."

"I'm quite willing to act when I get marching orders," said Bannatyne meekly.

"We'd better make a start," said young Walrond in a bluff tone. "Go ahead, please."

Bannatyne turned about, set his face to the Wilderness once more, and began to ascend. Surely he was doomed never to return from those nocturnal fastnesses. He knew he was in disgrace; these two young people had sat in judgment on him and condemned him. He was

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practically ostracized, save for the small amount of ceremonious civility that conversation demands.

"They make me feel so old," he reflected sadly, "and I'm only thirty-five—a mere boy, really. Heigho!"

"Perhaps you will be good enough to select a route," he suggested to Walrond when they encountered the first crossways.

But young Walrond had no hesitation. "This will take us upward," he said, and turned his attention to Miss Chloe.

Bannatyne now lagged behind as they mounted. "It would serve them right if I ran away and left them—and mamma," he thought; "and I would, for two pins. But I wonder if I could find my way alone. Better not risk it. No; let duty triumph. Let us save mamma."

"Did you say it was near some beeches?" called out young Walrond.

"I did," returned Bannatyne, with as much satire as he could squeeze into the two words.

"Oh, then, if there was water, I know it. We're not far off," said Walrond confidently.

"There, now," said Bannatyne cheerfully, "if Lady Merrington hadn't sat in the water we shouldn't have found her."

"We haven't yet," reminded Mr. Walrond grimly.

"Avaunt these doubts!" said Bannatyne.

They wheeled about a right angle. "The identical spot, I believe," he declared with some excitement. "Is anyone there?" he called.

"Lady Merrington!" called young Walrond.

"Mamma!" called Miss Chloe.

There was no answer. "It isn't the place," said Walrond in despair.

"It is—I will swear to it in an income-tax return," persisted Bannatyne. "There was the bank, and there the pool." He walked across.

"She's got tired of waiting and wandered away, and is lost," said Chloe miserably.

Her remark was succeeded by a violent exclamation from Bannatyne, who came tumbling over the bank and fell with a splash into water. Simultaneously there was a perturbed voice exclaiming:

"What is it? Go away, Hagan!"

"Mamma!" cried Chloe in ecstasy. She darted forward.

Bannatyne picked himself up slowly and examined his garments.

"I thought it was Hagan knocking," Lady Merrington was explaining confusedly. "I'm sorry—I suppose I dropped off. Where's Mr. Bannatyne? Was it an earthquake? I must have fallen out of bed. . . . Something kicked me very— Good gracious, Chloe, child, is it you?"

"Oh, mamma, I'm so glad we've found you! I thought we never should," cried poor Chloe.

Lady Merrington rose to her feet with difficulty, and with the aid of young Walrond.

"Who's this?" she asked. "Oh, isn't you, Mr. Walrond? I'm glad you came. Where's Mr. Bannatyne?"

"I'm here," said Bannatyne mildly.

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"It was good of you to go and get a relief party," said the lady kindly. "I must have dropped off—the warmth, you know."

"I think I dropped off too," murmured Bannatyne to his clothes. "I certainly didn't guess she would be asleep."

He adjusted his wet coat, and found himself now in juxtaposition with Walrond, for Chloe and her mother were following together. Young Walrond's tone had sensibly altered.

"I'm awfully sorry you had that fall," he said sympathetically. "Who could have told she was asleep?"

"As you say, who could have told?" said Bannatyne. "The accident had its value. It is a moral lesson. I should not go about rescuing distressed damsels."

Walrond gazed through his eyeglass, but seemed to decide not to touch this doubtful point. Indeed, he gave a faint laugh, as of one who is appreciative.

"I didn't know you were Mr. Bannatyne. I didn't catch your name before," he said at last.

Was this, then, the result of his discovery? Bannatyne wondered.

"I once shot over your place with a friend of mine," pursued the young man amiably. "He rented it."

"Ah!" said Bannatyne. "Was that Staffordshire, or perhaps Hampshire?"

"No; it was Stockowen," said Walrond.

"Ah, yes; Stockowen. And is it very charming? They tell me it is a beautiful place, and the house is hand-

some. I hope you found the house handsome and comfortable."

Young Walrond stared. "Oh, I— Yes, thanks— awfully, I think so," he said stammeringly.

"Stockowen!" murmured Bannatyne dreamily. "I hope some day to go there. Perhaps I shall go there when I die. I was once quite close to it. Indeed, I may say I very nearly saw it. And it's pretty, is it?"

"Awfully jolly!" said the confounded young man. Why, here was a strange and reckless person, surely—a man who, though he owned several fine estates, did not know them, at least confessed himself a stranger to one. It invested Bannatyne with a sort of amplitude; it enlarged him; he gained in significance and in bearing. Looked at now in this new light, his air was regal. This indifferent appropriation of sovereign honors could not but add to his importance. Young Walrond was pleased to be walking in such good company; he was impressed.

"We ought to have a jolly time rehearsing," he remarked with a glow of satisfaction.

"Yes," said Bannatyne, turning to him. "You play——"

"*Quince*," said Walrond; "*Quince*, you know. Of course, it's not a very important part, but there's some good stuff in it, isn't there?"

"Very good stuff," assented Bannatyne.

"Of course, I'm not very keen on the part," continued Walrond, now in the mood for confidences. "I should have liked a better part, and *Bottom* outplays one, don't you know. Besides, it's a bit undignified, don't you

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know. And, well—I'd like to have been in a bit with the ladies. We haven't got one in our lot."

"No," said Bannatyne sympathetically; "it's only *Bottom* who has luck. He has *Titania*."

"Oh, I don't particularly envy *Bottom*," said young Walrond frankly. "He's—you see, Lady Coombe's my aunt."

"So that's how you know this confounded Wilderness so well," said Bannatyne. "It was puzzling me. I'm a pretty good hand at topography myself, but I've no head. Turn me round three times, and I get dizzy, and don't catch anything or anyone, except, of course, dryads."

"Dryads!" said Walrond in a puzzled voice.

"Dear me, there's the fire-bell. We move from sensation to sensation," said Bannatyne, as, far away, rising as if from some secluded and embowered dell, streamed a resonant clangor on the night. "Let's run."

Lady Merrington and her daughter were close behind them.

"It isn't fire," said young Walrond. "It's only supper. They arranged to give warning that way with the alarm bell, so as they could hear it in the park rehearsing."

"Then let's run all the more," said Bannatyne pleasantly. "Give me your hand, Miss Chloe," and ere she could gainsay him, he had snatched her from her mother's protection, and was gayly tripping down the moonlit path. Lady Merrington looked after them complacently.

"They make a fine couple, Mr. Walrond," said she ruminately.

"I'm afraid Miss Merrington will be horribly tired," he observed coldly.

"Tut! she's well enough," said her mother. "If I can run, she can. Give me your hand, Mr. Walrond."

The young man extended his with unperceived reluctance, and they began to jog down the pathway in the wake of the others.

"Supper," said Bannatyne to his lady, "is the one thing I love above all others. When I am shaving, in the early dawn, I am looking forward to it. Does this jig you about too much?"

"Ye— No," said Chloe, gasping.

"Keep tight hold of me, hold your breath, and strike out confidently," he enjoined.

Chloe giggled faintly. "I—I think we won't go quite so fast," she panted. "I've not got—much—breath—now."

"We'll stop at once, fairy," said he, and reduced the pace to a walk. "Now I'm going to let you into a secret. You can't galumph. I'm going to teach you how to galumph. First, can you galumph?"

"What's galumph?" inquired Chloe, laughing. Her laugh was as pretty as Kathleen's.

"This is galumphing," said he. "Two little steps on each foot, on the toe of the foot—the ball of the foot, rather. Now try, if you have your breath, and we'll skim down to the open park like winking. There's nothing like galumphing for getting over the ground. And it eases you, too. Now—" He tucked his arm in hers, for in galumphing that is necessary, and they began.

"Two skips on the ball of the right foot—two on the left, repeated *ad infinitum*. Now—" They galumphed.

Chloe Merrington laughed her girlish laughter on the wind, and, as it were, on the wings of the wind they flew down the white way. The musical trill came back to Walrond as he piloted Lady Merrington in the rear.

"Chloe's very merry," observed her mother. "I'm afraid I can't go so fast, Mr. Walrond," she panted.

Walrond was not merry. "It's a wonder Mr. Bannatyne hasn't married," she resumed. "He must be five-and-thirty."

Walrond wished devoutly that he had married. "He's rather getting on," he said moodily.

"Pshaw, he's only a boy," said the lady. "What do you lads know of ages? I suppose you think I'm old enough to be your grandmother."

Young Walrond wished to say that he did not think about it, but he was anxious to please Chloe's mother and refrained from the rejoinder. Besides, they were now emerging into the park, and Bannatyne and his companion had come to a pause and were awaiting them.

"Mamma, can you galumph?" called out Chloe joyously.

"Galumph!" said Lady Merrington doubtfully.

"Yes; Mr. Bannatyne's been teaching me how to galumph, and it's delightful. We came down that last part awfully fast; didn't we, Mr. Bannatyne?"

"Like a motor car, like a—" Bannatyne, who had been feeling in his pockets, suddenly stopped. "It's gone! I've lost it!" he said.

"What have you lost?" inquired Chloe with interest.

"It jumped out of my pocket, no doubt," he continued; and in a whisper: "Please don't desert me. I must find it. Stand by me. I wouldn't lose it for the world."

"What's the matter?" asked Lady Merrington.

"Please don't let me keep you," said Bannatyne. "You and Mr. Walrond go on. I've only dropped something, and Miss Chloe is going to help me to find it."

"I'll help, too," said young Walrond. "What was it?"

"No; you're going to take me on," said Lady Merrington firmly, her Irish brogue uppermost. "Didn't you tell me that was the supper bell?"

Poor young Walrond yielded reluctantly, but hatred was in his heart, particularly for Bannatyne. Chloe did not even notice his departure.

"What is it?" she asked of Bannatyne, her breath coming fast still with her recent exertion.

"Come." He took her hand. "Let's go up the path slowly. 'The moon shines with a good grace.' If you see anything strange, whisper to me," he said mysteriously. "Indeed, perhaps you'd better point."

"Point?" she said wonderingly.

"Yes, point, like a pointer, you know," said he. "A pointer points with his tail and with his nose. Of course, you couldn't point with your tail, but you could point with your nose."

Chloe was seated on the grass. "Mr. Bannatyne, you're just talking nonsense," she said—"awful non-

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sense! And I don't think it's at all nice of you to refer to my nose."

"But your nose is charming," he assured her. "I've been admiring it ever since I met you, up above there. You can point all the better with a charming nose."

"You know it—it turns up a little," said Chloe hesitatingly.

"I'd like to see the man that dared say so," said Bannatyne fiercely. "It's sweetly tip-tilted, not turned up. It's like that fabled petal of the flower. If anyone mentioned 'turned up' to me——"

"Hadn't we better begin?" said Chloe in some embarrassment.

"Yes, please. Now you keep that side, and we'll crawl up, so that we can see the ground better."

"Oh, but I can't crawl," protested Miss Merrington. "It would ruin my frock, and, besides, it would hurt, and it would make one's hands show lines and horrid redness."

"Let me see your hands," said he, and took one, inspecting it gravely. "Yes, the line of life goes strong; so does that of the heart. You're destined to a——"

"Oh, do tell me, Mr. Bannatyne!" she urged excitedly, as he stopped.

Bannatyne pushed his hair back in thoughtful perplexity. "Now, do you know, I always forget what that does stand for. I know it's something important. In fact, it's vital—that combination. It means either early death, or a rich marriage where love is not, or——"

"I don't believe you know," said Chloe tremulously.

"That's just what I'm saying," he declared. "I don't know. It means either——"

"I'm going to look for—what did you say you'd lost?" interrupted Miss Merrington brusquely, and then a thought dawned on her. "I don't believe you've lost anything," she said indignantly. "I believe you've been pretending all along."

"I assure you, I spoke the truth," said he earnestly. "Not but what I should be excused for pretending to prolong this delightful companionship. But, indeed, I've lost a—well, I can't exactly tell you. It wouldn't be quite right. But if you see anything that strikes you as suspicious, call out."

He began to move up the pathway, with his head bent, peering as he walked. Chloe followed him, still in some doubts, and wholly in perplexity. Her head fairly swam, but she did not know that she disliked it. Certainly her heart had galloped far quicker since she had met Mr. Bannatyne. She seemed to have gone through a full cycle of emotions. She was glad her mother had taken Mr. Walrond away. He was really rather tiresome, and he was so young. As these thoughts passed through her head confusedly, her eyes alighted on something.

"Oh, here's something!" she called out. "It's a—a shoe, I think."

"It's mine," said Bannatyne promptly.

"Oh, but it's a woman's shoe!" said Chloe, picking it up.

"Excuse me—mine," said he, taking it from her.

"Do you collect shoes?" asked Chloe with a laugh.

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"*A* shoe," he corrected. "I collect *a* shoe."

Chloe Merrington looked at him in bewilderment, in which was also a sense of amusement. She knew that he was "funny," and was prepared to giggle at him, but she did not quite understand.

Bannatyne put the shoe in his pocket. "It was galumphing did it," he remarked. "I should never have forgiven myself if— By the way, it isn't by any chance your shoe, is it, Miss Chloe?" he asked suddenly.

Chloe stammered. "Oh, no—not—of course not!"

"I'm sorry," he observed with a sigh. "Never mind. It's some one's. Murder will out; so will shoes. Now let's get on. How's the appetite? Mine's been clamoring since seven o'clock, and is in a beast of a temper. I wonder if Peter Bouverie will have eaten all the supper! Goddess, what a night!" He stretched his arms to the descending, impassive moon, and Chloe watched him with interest. He turned about to her, as if remembering unexpectedly.

"I've never thanked you for the find. Please register me as your emphatic debtor. I'll pay up when called upon. I'll pay at sight in any medium desired. You have prevented my heart from breaking. Don't strange things happen, Miss Chloe? What a night! Goddesses and nymphs and fairies peopled that wood this night—particularly dryads. Do let us get on, or we shall lose our supper. Shall we galumph? Oh, no; I forgot. I mustn't. But I'll do anything else for you, Miss Chloe. I'll carry you, if you will."

CHAPTER V

THE SUPPER TABLE

BANNATYNE and his companion reached the Hall when the supper was in full swing, and the room was full of babble and laughter. He emerged from the shadows of the courtyard into the lights behind Miss Chloe, and glanced rapidly about the table. It seated some thirty people, who were all engaged in eating and chattering and drinking. The shadows of several silent footmen wavered on the dark wainscoting of the Elizabethan room. Out in the courtyard the moon shone still, and contended with the candles in the mullioned windows. Bannatyne emerged, a man of somewhat over middle stature, near by thirty-five, of a robust freshness of complexion, fair of coloring, and free and clear of eye. That clarity of blue eye was wont to engage those newly acquainted with him most and first of all. He looked frank, and added to that frankness of heart and voice, a touch of whimsey, a quizzical expression that was also attractive. Offhand he looked a charming fellow.

Bannatyne and Chloe found places without calling upon themselves undue attention. She slipped bashfully into a chair he pulled out for her, and he seated himself beside her. The table was fairly ahum. Bannatyne noted with approval the girl's prettiness in the stronger

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revealing light. There was immaturity naturally, but a bud is often more beautiful than the blown flower. Perhaps Chloe would open beautifully too. He devoutly hoped so, as he looked at her, and then a servant dumped down plates before them.

"I can't make out mine," he said, peering with one eye shut at the dish. "What have you got?"

Chloe shook her head, laughing. "I think it's something of chicken," said she. "But I'm only guessing."

"Open your mouth and shut your eyes, and let me give you a morsel, and guess again," he suggested.

She shook her head again, again laughing.

"Well, if I wasn't hungry I don't think I should eat this," he went on, turning it over with a fork. "It looks suspiciously like— Now, do tell me—you know everything and everyone—Miss Chloe, do tell me who that is two doors down on the opposite side of the table."

Chloe glanced across to where a young man lolled back in his chair, clean shaved, and delicately pale of face. His proportions were slender, his color almost feminine; he had a distinctive air at once of confidence and of shyness; and his hair, which was of a beautiful fairness, was somewhat long for fashion.

"Oh, it's Mr. Oliver Lock," said Chloe. "He's awfully clever."

"What's he clever at?" inquired Bannatyne.

"Oh, he paints, and he writes poetry, and he plays and composes; and he studies philosophy; and——"

"There isn't any more, I hope," said he.

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"Well, he's a composer most of all," she said, laughing.

"To his various accomplishments he has now to add acting, I understand," said Bannatyne.

"What's he going to play?" inquired Chloe with interest.

"*Bottom*," said Bannatyne solemnly.

Chloe Merrington stared at him, and then suddenly and mysteriously exploded with laughter. She sat back in her chair, and, inserting her lace handkerchief between her teeth, shook all over her slim young body.

"If there's any joke, I'm afraid I've missed it," said Bannatyne reproachfully.

"Oh, it isn't a joke," panted Chloe with renewed symptoms of hysteria. "It's only so funny."

"I'm glad if I've amused you, Miss Merrington," said Bannatyne, with an excellent assumption of stiffness.

Chloe came back quickly to seriousness. "Oh, it wasn't you, Mr. Bannatyne, really," she said earnestly. "I wasn't laughing at you, indeed. It was the idea of Mr. Lock playing *Bottom*. It's too funny."

Bannatyne's neighbor on the other hand turned round to them, attracted by the laughter, and he saw it was Miss Arden. She had been busily engaged in talk with Ferris.

"You're late in, Mr. Bannatyne," said she sweetly. "What became of you? Mr. Hancock was in such a state when you couldn't be found."

"I didn't get my call," he explained. "And, besides, I lost my way. Tell me, did *Hermia* take on?"

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Miss Arden laughed. She was fair and pale, and in her dead white gown gave the effect of whiteness and purity.

"I don't think she minded so much as Mr. Hancock," she answered.

"Then she ought," said he indignantly. "She ought to have minded, more than all the others put together. I'll—I declare, I'll turn to *Helena*!"

A faint color flushed Miss Arden's cheeks. "Well, *Lysander* does—doesn't he?" she said lightly. "But that is only under the influence of magic. His heart never really strays from *Hermia*."

"It's all a question of magic," Bannatyne assured her. "What sends men to women's feet but magic? I don't pretend to understand," he declared with a gesture of despair. "I merely recognize facts—don't I, Miss Chloe?"

Miss Arden regarded Chloe with her cool eyes.

"Miss Chloe rescued me from death in the forest," he explained.

"How delightfully romantic!" said Miss Arden formally. Her face was slightly averted as she listened to some remark of Ferris's, and the profile, the curves of chin and jaw, were wonderful in their delicate decision. Bannatyne admired as he gazed. He looked round and found Chloe's eyes on him.

"Isn't she sweetly pretty?" murmured Chloe.

"She's—she's angelic," he declared thoughtfully. "I wonder why *Lysander* was such a weathercock? Do you like men who are weathercocks, Miss Chloe? Don't trust

them ever. Men who don't know their own minds are worse than—well, worse than men who do. Why didn't *Hermia* miss me?"

Chloe watched his face. "Do you admire Miss Grant-Summers?" she asked.

"Immensely—inordinately," said Bannatyne, helping himself to some wine. "Is she not my *Hermia*, and have I not chosen her? I have not, by the way, exchanged more than two sentences with her, and I never set eyes on her till to-night. But what odds is that? Love laughs at locksmiths, and recognizes no laws of common sense. If it were sensible, it would not be love."

"What awful things are you saying?" asked Miss Arden, turning her head.

"Miss Chloe and I were discussing love," said Bannatyne calmly and untruthfully explanatory. "I am of the opinion that love lasts forever, if it be true love. Miss Chloe, on the contrary, is of the opinion that love lasts only a day, and that you may be allowed to love as many people and as many times as——"

"Oh, Mr. Bannatyne, how can you say such things?" burst in Chloe with flaming cheeks. "I never spoke about it at all. It was you. I never opened my mouth."

"I wish you would, child, for you've eaten absolutely nothing," said Bannatyne with solicitude.

The color did not wholly retreat from Chloe's face. It wavered and hung there faintly as she obediently followed Bannatyne's advice. Miss Arden scrutinized the young girl, but her face expressed nothing. She smiled, indifferently challenging in her smile, at Bannatyne.

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"*Lysander* was a fool," he confided to her. "He was a fool, to begin with, for imagining he preferred the advertising beauty of *Hermia* to the moonlight charm of *Helena*; and he was a fool, in the next place, because, when he had come to know better, he hadn't the strength of mind to stick to it. 'We needs must love the highest when we see it,' Miss Arden, and that fatuous, empty-headed *Lysander* deliberately turns his back on—I think I'll get Lady Coombe to let us play a revised and up-to-date version of Shakespeare."

Miss Arden laughed her cool laugh, and fidgeted softly, but not too nervously, with her bread crumbs.

"You are too absurd," she said.

From the other end of the table Bannatyne had now been discovered by Hancock, also by Sir Edward Coombe.

"The villain is over there," he heard Bouverie say.

"Bannatyne! Bannatyne!" called Hancock furiously. "What on earth made you play that trick on us?"

"Wretch!" said Lady Coombe from another end of the table. "*Hermia* was disconsolate."

Voices menaced him; it seemed as if the whole table had broken out on him. A little way off, on the other side, he could see Miss Grant-Summers, who had been arrested by the discussion. She was looking toward him, her lips parted, a smile on her face, undisturbed and self-possessed, her rich beauty richer than he had imagined, seen in that setting. She was amusedly interested in the scene, and she waited for his rejoinder. There was never a woman so sure of herself as Miss Grant-Summers; and surely there had been rarely a woman more beautiful.

Vigilance was in her eye, command in the sweep of her throat and neck. As he met her glance momentarily Bannatyne wondered involuntarily if she had a mind. He was sure his neighbor, *Helena*, had. She had a serene, cold intellect somewhere; she was wholly superior. Was *Hermia*? It was not possible to tell. She was bright with every property and faculty of woman—somewhere, he guessed, near seven-and-twenty, an admirable age. He knew no more.

The attention of the table was upon him. Bannatyne sipped his wine. Sir Edward, ruddy of shaven face, good-natured, placid, and fifty, raised his glass from the distance.

“Didn’t see you, Bannatyne. Glad you’ve come.” He went through the forms requisite to drinking to his guest.

Bannatyne bowed, and drank to him. Then he set down his glass. “The fact is, Lady Coombe,” he said grimly, “that Wilderness of yours is haunted.”

“Haunted!” said several interested voices.

“Yes, distinctly haunted,” he repeated. “I am almost a wreck. I have no strength to tell the tale, but Lady Merrington will no doubt do that far better. She knows. Ask her.”

“What’s it haunted by?” asked Chloe, her eyes bright with the interest which he had managed to inspire in her.

“Pretty girls! Hush!” he said in a whisper.

Miss Grant-Summers was looking across, still with her pleasant embracing eye. Her dark eyes smiled, and then she was swept into conversation by her neighbor.

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Suddenly there was a wave of commotion. Chairs were pushed back and creaked, plates clattered, and there was the sound of rustling dresses. The company broke its containing order and drifted in indecision, chatter, and chance. Bannatyne passed along the room, greeting a friend at intervals. It was Bouverie who arrested him at last, tapping a cigar case interrogatively.

"By all means," said he, nodding. "Now I come to think of it, I believe I've been bewitched. I've not thought of smoking for hours."

"There's probably some truth in what you say," said Peter Bouverie, eying him in his lazy way.

"Oh, there's Lady Fallowfield! I must pay my respects," said his friend, and made his way toward the door, where stood an elegant woman of five-and-forty in conversation with their hostess. She greeted Bannatyne with the frank smile of one who knows her own mind and is accustomed to reveal it.

"This is perfectly charming!" said he, taking her hand in both of his. "This is charmingly perfect. I didn't guess—I only hoped. Lady Coombe kept me in ignorance, I suppose for a surprise. And you're playing, I hope?"

Lady Fallowfield shook her head, laughing. "Not I, my friend. Cynthia is."

"Cynthia?" he echoed. "Not the Cynthia I remember, in short frocks?"

"The very Cynthia," said the countess, and called over her shoulder, "Cynthia!"

From a little group a girl detached herself and came

toward them. She was tall, brown of tress, of a gentle fullness, and moved as lissom as a panther.

"Not Cynthia, this!" cried out Bannatyne in astonishment.

"Cynthia, do you remember Mr. Bannatyne?" said Cynthia's mother, smiling.

Cynthia looked uncertain.

"Lady Cynthia, *do* remember me," he pleaded. "Can't you recall an objectionable person with a swelled head, who stayed with you ten years ago—is it ten years, Lady Fallowfield?—and who was of opinion that the world was made for him, and that his opinions were made for the world? Oh, I can see myself so well then, Lady Fallowfield! I was twenty-five, and folly. And there was a certain little girl who escorted me safely to church, and put me courteously in the old square pew."

Lady Cynthia's face lighted up. "Oh, yes, I do remember you quite well! And you fell asleep, and I was afraid you—you would disturb the——"

"It was very hot," said Bannatyne reproachfully. "You might have made allowances for that. And when you say you were afraid I'd disturb—of course you mean wake—the other worshipers, you are insinuating that I snored."

Lady Cynthia blushed. "No, I wasn't, Mr. Bannatyne, really. I remember only being afraid you *would* snore."

"You might have trusted to my discretion," he said, and regarded her with the open interest of his usual expression.

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Her eyes were firm and quick; she had that in common with her mother; but they were as two-and-twenty to twice those years.

"I begin to feel old," said he with a mock sigh. "When I see charming young ladies whom I remember with long hair, long legs, long——"

"Please no more disclosures," interrupted Lady Fallowfield, laughing.

"And what does Lady Cynthia play?" asked Bannatyne.

"Oh, I'm only one of the fairies," returned the girl. "I'm the first fairy in attendance."

"Of course, it must have been you I saw rehearsing," he remarked.

"Cynthia, love, bed," said the countess.

"Yes, mother," replied the girl obediently, and passed on with a little smile and bow. Behind her another girl of her own age, but short and slighter, came with a little excited rush.

"You remember Sylvia Latham?" said Lady Fallowfield. "That's her daughter. You're going to bed, Kitty?" she said to the girl, as she passed, with a shy, embarrassed air.

"Oh, yes," said Kitty, with a nervous little laugh, and disappeared.

"And what is Kitty?" asked Bannatyne. "I seem to have seen Kitty before."

"Oh, she's a fairy, too," said Lady Fallowfield.

"Wonderful fairies!" he said rapturously; and after a pause, "I wish they'd let me play *Titania*."

Lady Fallowfield laughed, but checked herself to say: "Isn't it quite absurd Lady Coombe's playing that part? At her age, too!"

"Dear lady, I wish you would give me the chance of playing *Oberon* to your *Titania*," he declared.

Lady Fallowfield's face sparkled with an access of animation.

"You don't really," said she, "but I like to hear you say it; you lie so well. No, *Titania* should have gone, of course, to, say, Miss Grant-Summers, or Miss Arden, or, well—or Cynthia even."

"Lady Cynthia would fill the part admirably," he agreed.

"It's part of her inordinate vanity that she must keep all the pretty girls in attendance on her," pursued the lady aggrievedly. "It would be annoying if it weren't so laughable."

"So many things would be annoying if they weren't laughable," he said. "That's the use of laughter."

"Good night; I'm tired," said his companion abruptly, as she was wont. Her actions were as confident as her tongue. She nodded in a friendly fashion, for she liked Bannatyne. "There's sure to be some fun to-morrow. The whole thing's preposterous, you know."

"I know it is. I'm so glad it is," called out Bannatyne as she went.

In the smoking room the men collected preparatory to retiring. Peter Bouverie stood, his long legs parted, with a big cigar in his mouth, his back to the window and the moon.

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"If we hadn't sworn an oath I would have broken it to-night," said he to the company generally.

"What oath have we sworn?" inquired Bannatyne anxiously. "Not *not* to fall in love, I hope?"

"Not to play bridge," said Madgwick gloomily.

"Why did you swear that silly, self-denying ordinance—which, however, will do you a great deal of good, Bouverie?" inquired his friend.

"Lady Coombe made it a point of honor," said he solemnly. "She said we should do nothing else if we once took to it, and she wanted us to do nothing but rehearse. Consequently you see us rehearsing."

"I didn't quite see you. I heard you," said Bannatyne.

"Bannatyne's anathema. I've cursed him with bell, book, and candle," observed Hancock, who was turning over the leaves of an illustrated paper.

Ferris yawned, and indolently put out his hand for a cigarette. His overhandsome face was dashed with superciliousness. He had just emerged from a fracas with Hancock, in which he had been worsted. It had concerned the stage management of the first scene, on which, as *Demetrius*, Ferris had decided ideas.

Hancock, a brisk little, dark, red-complexioned man, with a round, smooth face, who was supposed to follow the calling of a barrister, and who actually had chambers in the Inner Temple, threw aside his paper suddenly. "I'll tell you what," he said. "You fellows will have to get letter perfect to-morrow. There are only three days, and there's the devil of a lot to get through. I'm not going to trust to your promises. Bouverie, you're all right."

Bouverie bowed leisurely. "I always am."

"You're not bad, Ferris, if you didn't try to throw in so much mucky sentiment." Ferris ignored this. "You're all out of it, old man"; this to Captain Madgwick. "And what the devil Bannatyne can do, or can't do, is more than I can say, not having had the privilege of listening to him."

"I'm awfully sorry, Hancock, but I'll begin now, if you'll hear me," said Bannatyne, jumping to his feet.

"But this *Bottom* business is the worst of all," went on Hancock gloomily, paying no heed. "It fairly knocks the heart out of one. The most important part in the piece vacant! Think of it! Ye gods! By the way, where's Lock?"

"I saw him out on the lawn," said a young man, "smoking a cigarette."

"Just fetch him in, Gay, will you?" said Hancock, and added in a lachrymose way: "We must settle it somehow. It's sheer madness!"

As they debated the point, gloomily entered, one hand in his pocket and the other holding a big volume of philosophy, young Oliver Lock, blue-eyed and indifferently conscious of himself. He wore an up-and-down collar with a wonderful furniture of scarf in an artistic hue.

"O Lock! how does the music go?" asked Hancock.

"Fair," said the young man in an offhand voice. He placed his book on the table and lit a cigarette. "That's to say I've got two pretty good fiddles, and I think I can get a 'cello, besides the piano."

"What about the songs?" asked Hancock.

Oliver Lock pursed his mouth into position, and whistled a stave without any expression or emotion in his face. "I've done two," he said casually. "Do another to-night."

"Good! Then that finishes them," said Hancock in a businesslike way. "That clears the road for us. Let me have 'em to-morrow, first thing, and Lady Cynthia and the others shall get into rehearsal at once. No time to lose. And now, Lock, I know you've a quick memory. You've got to play *Bottom*."

Oliver Lock looked up, arrested, and interested now for the first time. *Bottom!*" he echoed with some contempt in his voice. "How absurd! I don't act!"

"Yes, but you've just got to," persisted Hancock authoritatively. "We've lost Valence, and we can't go on without *Bottom*. Come now, you can get into the skin of the part to-morrow morning, and it won't interfere with your music."

The young man stroked back his hair with self-conscious carelessness. "I won't do anything of the kind," he said.

"Good heavens, man, you must!" argued the unfortunate Hancock. "We shall be in an awful hole otherwise."

"You've plenty of people to play *Bottom*," said Oliver Lock indifferently. "Get one of them."

"They're all fixed. You're the only disengaged man. You'll simply have to do it. Why the mischief won't you?"

"It's not consistent with my personality," said Mr.

Lock with dignity, and, without more ado or even a good night, sauntered out of the room, book in hand, cigarette in mouth.

"May I be dam—" began Hancock with deliberate viciousness.

"It's probable your play will be," said Bouverie serenely.

Hancock made a helpless gesture with his hands.

"Inspiration dawns on me," remarked Bannatyne, sitting up. "Let us follow Shakespeare; we can do no better than walk in the footsteps of the master."

Bouverie looked at him interrogatively. "What on earth are you driving at?" said Hancock impatiently.

"Why, this, O mutton-head. When *Theseus* wanted a pastoral play, did he not go to the village and engage rustics? Why, then, now that Lady Coombe wants a pastoral play, should we not take example from the Athenian king?"

"You mean——"

"I mean, find a *Bottom* in the village. I'll lay there's half a dozen there, blushing unseen."

Hancock mused. "Not half a bad idea," he said after a pause; and mused again. "An admirable idea!" he declared a little later; and then: "But we ought to have thought of that before—I mean, for *Quince* and *Snout*, and all the rest of them."

"You can find another *Quince*, if you like; I don't mind," said young Walrond from his corner.

"I'm not keen on *Snout*," said Gay in his best Oxford voice. "I think Mr. Bannatyne's is an excellent idea."

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"Don't be fools!" said Hancock swiftly. "How am I to get a parcel of rustics to get up the parts and rehearse 'em, and lick 'em into condition in three days? No; I might manage *Bottom*, if we can hit upon a good man. We might have a search to-morrow morning, Bannatyne. If we can't, I'll have to wire for a professional. And that would spoil sport."

"We'll form ourselves into an investigating committee," said Bannatyne. "Send a commission to the village to find *Bottom*. 'Bully *Bottom*, I believe'; 'How I found *Bottom*, by Joseph P. Hancock, Barrister-at-Law of the Inner Temple.'"

"I wish you'd been *Bottom*, Bannatyne," said Hancock regretfully. "If I'd only known . . . but Lady Coombe would have it all her own way; and here's the result. I'm going to bed."

He finished his whisky and soda quickly and departed, and the smoking-room party broke up with offhand exchanges of good night. Bouverie accompanied Bannatyne up the stairs.

"We're west wing," he explained. "You're a few doors from me. It must be one, or after. I never felt so sleepy. I suppose it's the air, or the moonlight, or perhaps the supper." He leaned on a sill of one of the mullioned windows that looked out across the park to the sinking moon, the bright heaven, and the shadows of the hills beyond.

"There's seething discontent among *Bottom's* lot," he said. "It's by way of being my fault. I came upon

innumerable young men here, with commensurate airs and graces, and I didn't know one from t'other. It's Lady Coombe's whim. She's 'wonderful partial' to young men, assumably to keep relations with the past—an unclouded past, we know. But Oxford collars and Oxford manners, not to mention Oxford voices, started in me what is, I believe, vulgarly known as the pip. I got the pip—" His deliberate voice ceased, and he seemed to contemplate the romantic night. "So I suggested to Lady Coombe that it would adequately meet the necessities of the situation if the young men were grouped together as the rustics." Again he paused. "Not a bad idea, was it?"

"A master-stroke," agreed Bannatyne, yawning.

"The advantages of the artifice are patent," pursued Bouverie. "I am relieved of the nuisance, and they are all in a state of suppressed insubordination. That was why Valence bolted. These young men stand upon their dignity more than we of maturer years do. *Bottom* bolted, as I say, and all the others would throw up their parts for two pins."

"You seem to have intrigued most successfully," said Bannatyne admiringly.

"I didn't do badly for a new hand," said Peter Bouverie with modest pride. "I suppose it's being in Parliament gives one confidence, and teaches one diplomacy. Well, you're going to turn in, I suppose. The night's good, but bed's better. Good night."

He swung away slowly, and left Bannatyne staring out into the park.

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“The night’s good,” he repeated abstractedly. “The night’s amazing.

‘I heard the trailing garments of the night . . .’

No; it’s oversilent now. ‘Clothed with night as with a garment’—that’s better. ‘Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.’ No; the moon banishes the stars, and is justified of her act. One single segment moon is worth a thousand twinkling stars. Good night, beloved . . .’

Across the courtyard a light shone in a window.

“Now, if I kissed my hand to that,” said he thoughtfully, “it would probably turn out to be Sir Edward Coombe. But, on the other hand, if I don’t, it is sure to be my dryad.” He broke off, and straightened himself. “Good Lord, I’ve forgotten. My quest! where was Gladys?” He turned. “In bed long since, no doubt, and wanting a shoe. So perish all romantic dreams! Either a village Audrey or Gladys, unfledged, feathering Gladys.”

Bannatyne passed down the corridor toward his room, and, as he did so, came upon a footman who stood aside to let him pass; but he did not pass. “Can you tell me where my room is, please?” said he, and added his name. The man directed him. “Thank you,” said he in his suavest tones; “and now, one particular thing I want to know: what size is Miss Gladys’s boot?”

The servant stared at him in astonishment, which, however, ebbed swiftly from his well-controlled face. “I am sure I don’t know, sir. But I’ll ask the maid, sir.”

"Thank you a hundred times, I wish you would," said Bannatyne.

He went to his room, and two minutes later, as he was undressing, there was a knock on the door. He opened it, and the footman stood there, tall, impressive, and imposing.

"Small sixes, if you please, sir," said he.

"Small sixes!" said Bannatyne reflectively; "would that be very big, or very little?"

"I'm sorry I don't know, sir," said the footman, respectfully apologetic.

"We are really very ignorant, when you come to think of it, aren't we?" said Bannatyne, "particularly about things that matter, like sizes of women's boots."

"Yes, sir," said the footman.

"Oh, well, that will do, thank you," said Bannatyne, and nodded "good night."

The man returned the farewell and shut the door softly. Bannatyne resumed his wondering.

He took the shoe from his pocket and examined it carefully under the light. "Small," he summarized his impressions. "Either a very young girl, or a medium girl with an elegant foot." He turned it over, and his eyes rested on a figure which had been almost rubbed away. He thrust it nearer to the light.

"Fives!" he declared, with a sense of triumph. "It's not Gladys's. I can rest in peace now. But it may be—no, I'll not believe it. It's neither Gladys's nor Audrey's. It's just my dryad's, and I'll run her to earth yet. And so to bed."

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY IN THE BEDROOM

BANNATYNE walked to the window and looked out upon the darkling park, strewn with great trees and diversified with smooth sward. Round a bend in the ascent to the Wilderness, the moon shone silverly upon a sea of bracken that flowed in the night wind. He breathed contentment in a deep sigh, and, opening one of his bags, took out a book. It was a volume of Rossetti, and as he turned the pages he lighted a last cigarette.

“A deep, dim wood; and there she stands
As in that wood that day; for so
Was the still movement of her hands,
And such the pure line’s gracious flow.”

He paused, got into bed, and read again:

“Dull raindrops smote us, and at length
Thundered the heat within the hills—
That eve I spoke those words again
Beside the pelted window-pane;
And then she hearkened what I said,
With underglances that surveyed
The empty pastures blind with rain.”

“Wonderful! wonderful!” sighed Bannatyne appreciatively. “‘The empty pastures blind with rain.’ It is

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Rossetti's very finest poem. Magnificent!" He adjusted the book to the light:

"Last night at last I could have slept
And yet delayed my sleep till dawn,
Still wandering. Then it was I wept:
For unawares I came upon
Those glades where once she walked with me,
And as I stood there, suddenly,
All wan with traversing the night,
Upon the desolate verge of light
Yearned loud the iron-bosomed sea."

Bannatyne let the hand that held the volume drop, and looked at the ceiling ruminatingly. He was in a mood attuned to sentiment, and he could see the glades in which that dead woman had once walked.

"O Heart, that never beats nor heaves,
In that one darkness lying still . . . "

He could have wept like the poet. The moonlight took the glades of Temple Park, where other lovers had walked ages since, other lovers whose hearts also were silent and had gone "seaward a hundred sleeping years ago." And they who walked the glades to-day would in their turn pass into silence. It all assumed the tragic cast of a phantasmagoria of fleeting shades—the full oaks, the cold moonlight, the pomp of life, the elusive ghosts in the amphitheater of bracken, the pretty fairies under whose bodices beat hearts not silent, but loud with every human emotion. . . . In that deep, dim wood many had walked to-night. . . . There were *Demetrius* and

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Helena. He let his thoughts roam over Miss Arden, tried to remember her Christian name, and could not. . . . Then, with a start, he found he was falling asleep with the light still ablaze. He got up to switch off the current, and set his book on a chair. As he did so his eyes rested on the shoe.

"Fives," he murmured, and took it up; then carefully placed it by the book on his chair. "Who knows?" said he, following his whimsey. "Romance is here implicit; it greets me on the threshold. The shoe has earned its company with the poet."

It pleased his sentimental mood to associate the poems and the shoe. He would open a crusade on the morrow, and no Cinderella should escape him. Then he remembered that he had left the rose in his coat, and extracted it delicately. He poured a little whisky from a flask into a glass and filled it up with water. The rose would fade, and it had a duty to perform. He would keep it fresh as long as possible, at the risk of "making it a tippler," as he said.

"Women," he reflected, "are most preposterous humbugs. I know exactly what it is. My observations have been useless this night. Of course she went away and obtained another pair of shoes at once, and, equally of course, she would not betray herself. The only person I'm *quite* sure of is Lady Merrington. I eliminate her. But after her I wander in a fog. It might be anyone—even, yes, even Chloe. There's no trusting women. They're a pack of hypocrites. They never show what they feel, and they never feel what they show. I believe

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it's *Helena*. I—" The idea caught him. "I should rather like it to be *Helena*, with her cold, white beauty." He sighed.

Then he went back to his bed, listened as he thought he heard footsteps pass his door, turned out the light, and sank into his pillows. He was asleep within ten minutes.

Bannatyne awoke stupidly to semiconsciousness. Was it morning? Had he been called? Was it the dawn that gleamed on the windows? Obviously it was not, for his window faced to the west. A slight noise struck on his sharpening senses, and he sat up. Some one was in the room.

"Who is that?" he demanded quickly.

For answer the chair by his bed clattered, the door flew open, and some one dashed through it with a swish of skirts. Bannatyne was out of bed in a moment, and almost by instinct put forth a hand for the chair. The shoe was gone, and as this fact reached him he was struggling into his dressing gown; and even as he did that he was halfway to the door. He was now as wide awake as anyone in this world could possibly be. He flung into the passage, slipperless, and, pausing only momentarily for news of the fugitive, raced swiftly along the corridor of the west wing.

The light was thin, merely that suffusion of the ambient moonlight that pervades such a night. Bannatyne could make out nothing ahead of him—it was all vacancy; but he had information of the thief in a fluttering of raiment and a patter of feet that reached him. He ran on, and then, losing the sounds, stopped suddenly.

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Was he too late? Had his prey taken refuge in one of the rooms hereabouts? Was it her own bedroom she had perchance arrived at? He waited, folded into the darkness of the corridor, and presently he thought he made out a quick, short breathing on the air. It issued from the open space upon his left which appeared to mark a turn in the corridor. He stealthily moved in that direction, putting out a hand.

Suddenly there was a little cry, and something white plunged against his arm with febrile force, threw it back, and fled incontinently past him, leaving the perfume of her passage behind her. Bannatyne turned too, and followed, and discovered now that he was rushing down a stairway at the highest speed he dared make in those silent hours of the night. At the bottom of the stairs the faint light now fell on a form that glided in a ghostly way not more than fifteen feet ahead of him. He increased his speed in the hope of catching her up, and then suddenly the figure vanished, as if it had been veritably a ghost. But in a few paces he had turned into a narrow passage and was speeding in pursuit once more. Then pursued and pursuer, quarry and hunter, went up a second staircase and along a new passage. There was scarcely a dozen feet between them, when the woman who fled turned the handle of a door and slipped into a room.

Bannatyne distinctly saw her do this in the dim light. Her head was wrapped in the friendly darkness, but he had seen her arm go forth and seize the handle. He came to a halt, almost breathless, before a door.

"I suppose it's a shame," he thought; "but I can't

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help it. I never knew a girl to run so fast. She's— Oh, it isn't Lady Coombe, for certain."

He had his bird caged now, and he waited outside, considering what course to pursue. Had he not, so to speak, tasted blood in that race, he might have duly noted the room, and gone back to his own chamber and repose, with the assurance that to-morrow he would be able to identify the occupant. This thought did flash through his mind, but to it succeeded another. After all, could he take note of the room? Where the mischief was he? He had an idea that he must be somewhere in the east wing, but he was not certain. And his blood was up, and he had been robbed, and he had the thief run to earth.

Obviously the thief might refuse to deliver, and probably would refuse to parley with him at all. But he was determined to rush the crisis, and so he approached boldly and knocked at the door.

There was no answer, and he had hardly expected one. There was no gleam of light through the chinks of the door. Those whose deeds were evil loved darkness rather than light. It was not likely that he would receive admission for his knock. But he presently knocked louder; and still silence reigned. A ruder spirit would have tried the handle, but Bannatyne was of more delicate mold. He waited again, and then rapped louder still. It was his formal challenge. After that ceremony he felt he had put himself in the right, and, courtesies thus exchanged, warfare must begin hotly in the morning. This was no mere affair of the gloves.

The third rapping was succeeded by an unmistakable

flare of light which found its way into the passage under the door. Ere he had time to marvel at this, a voice sounded muffled on his ear :

“Come in!”

To say the truth, Bannatyne hesitated. He cast one glance down his costume, tied the cords decorously about his waist, and then turned the handle very gingerly. The secret was his at last; the mystery was out. And was it the beginning or the ending of romance? His heart beat fast; his hand trembled.

It was not the electric light that had been turned on; what filled the room with a gentle luminousness was a candle that stood upon the dressing table wagging intermittently in the breeze that flowed between the open window and the now open door. As Bannatyne opened the latter, a blast struck the flame, and the candle guttered, flinging darkness like a wave across light. In that instant Bannatyne saw only a form clad in a pink dressing gown that stood in the shadow of the candle, expectant. The next moment the flame righted itself and he saw clearly.

It was a middle-aged face, and an unknown face, that confronted him, the somewhat sparse hair twisted into a tail and dangling on a neck that had once been smooth and white.

“I—I beg your pardon!” he stammered, greatly taken aback.

“Yes?” inquired the lady encouragingly. She showed no signs of surprise at the intrusion; she merely had the air of one waiting.

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"I—I'm very sorry, I'm sure," stammered Bannatyne. "But I came after my shoe."

An expression of perplexity crossed the lady's face. "You came after your shoe!" she repeated vaguely.

"At least I came after your shoe," he corrected, remembering.

"My shoe!" repeated the lady, still more vaguely.

"Yes, the one you lost—the one you stole——"

"The one I lost—the one I stole!" she said, with bewilderment apparent on her face.

She came a step nearer, as if to let the light play more fully on Bannatyne's face. She was of middle stature, and there was a firm and individual cast to her features.

"You don't look mad, my dear sir," she said, "but I must confess you talk as if you were."

Bannatyne had by this time recovered himself somewhat. He began to explain.

"You see, when you came into my room——"

"Pardon me," said the lady with sarcasm. "It is you who have come into mine."

"Yes, I will explain that directly," said poor Bannatyne. "I have to begin with your coming into mine."

"I did nothing of the sort," said the lady shortly, and with such decision that it silenced him.

"Well, some one came in," he resumed lamely after a disconcerted pause.

"Very possibly," said the lady, still sarcastically. "It seems to be a house where the practice thrives."

"But this lady—this visitor—ran off with my shoe—"

your—no, I mean a lady's shoe I had," went on Bannatyne dejectedly.

"I don't see what this has got to do with me!" said the lady with dignity. "I have nothing to do with your morals."

"But you must understand—you won't let me explain," said he miserably. "I was only accounting for my intrusion—for this unhappy mistake."

"It needed some explanation," agreed the lady.

"Well," went on Bannatyne hurriedly, "some one stole the shoe off my chair, and luckily I awoke, and gave chase, and the chase led me here, and the lady—the thief, disappeared into your room, and so I thought I would—I determined to—and so I'm here," he concluded weakly.

"That, at least, is obvious," said she, considering him; "and after 'this cock-and-bull' story I think the best thing you can do is to go somewhere else. I assume you know your room. But perhaps I assume that too rashly, in your present condition."

"I assure you," protested Bannatyne, "I'm quite——"

"Oh, yes, there are different degrees of it, I know," said the lady. "Let me see what the time is." She opened a watch under the light. "It's past two. I think now, sir, if you will be so kind as to leave me, I will endeavor to resume a sleep which you are responsible for interrupting."

Bannatyne, with stammered apologies, bowed and backed away till he was out of the room. He had retired defeated; and the defeat degenerated into a shameful

roul. The lady turned the key sharply in the closed door. Bannatyne fled precipitately.

His reflections were humiliating. He had rudely and unwarrantably trespassed on a spinster lady's privacy, and disturbed her by night alarms. No wonder she had put him down as drunken. His explanation must have seemed not merely lame and ineffectual, but positively fatuous. Now he revolved it in his agitated mind, what was all this nonsense about a shoe to pour into a middle-aged lady's ears in the dead watches of the night? It sounded preposterous. He had a lady's shoe, and some one had stolen it, and he quietly walked into Propriety's bedroom and accused a lady of stealing her own shoe. No; of course it was *not* her shoe. Out of the dreadful shame of the situation only that fact emerged pleasantly. The thief in the night, who had vanished into the night, had seemed to enter the unknown lady's bedroom; but clearly she had not. It was as evident, however, that the thief must lie nearby somewhere. At this consideration occurred to Bannatyne he paused in his headlong flight. He must make a note of the position of the room for the use of his investigations on the morrow. He retraced his way, but in the darkness was not certain where he was. Possibly the room was numbered or lettered in some way, and he could easily identify it in the morning, if he could identify it now. That, however, seemed at first beyond his powers; but presently he found a thread of light escaping from a doorway in the corridor, and he approached it noiselessly. There was no discriminating sign on the door, so far as he could make out

in the faint light ; but he remembered that he had a pencil in the pocket of his dressing gown, and he took this and scribbled a small D. From that advertisement he would be able to feel his way ; it should be the center of his further explorations. He had picked up a clew at last, despite his inward shame and his open disgrace.

Bannatyne proceeded now more equably, and with quieter nerves, to find his own room. He was, he supposed, in the eastern wing of the house, for there was no moon visible through windows, only the clouded light of an approaching dawn. He went to the farthest end of the corridor, and encountered some stairs ; by these he descended, and went along another passage. So far he was certain he was on a safe course. Then he reflected that if his room was in the west wing, it could best be reached by the connecting southern point or body of the house. In this direction, therefore, he made his way.

He explored several passages and took several large rooms in his course ; and presently, mounting a flight of broad stairs, came to the conclusion that he was in his own country. No doubt he would recognize his room when he saw it, particularly as the moon was now available in her last stages low down among the trees of the park. If his door had been left open (which he could not remember) he would have no difficulty in identifying the room. He passed along, all attention, but in the whole length of the corridor there was no open door. He retraced his steps, and halfway down again came to a pause, arrested by his memory. Had he not noticed that the elms in the vestibule of the drive were just visible from

the window outside his doorway? This must be only a dozen paces away from where Bouverie and he had leaned and looked forth at the night. He moved a dozen paces back, and leaned, as he had leaned earlier. Yes, he could swear it was the same spot. If so, he knew where his room was. Unhesitatingly he crossed the corridor and opened a door.

The handle turned, and he entered lightly, but ere he had moved more than two paces, and while the door was yet in his hand, he heard a sound. It was a slow, soft indrawn sighing of the breath, as of one sunk in dreamless slumber. Bannatyne hastily retreated with the shame of a second offense confronting him. He closed the door very quietly, but stumbled over some boots on the threshold.

Panic fell upon him at the sound, and he sped as if for life into the darkness of the passage. It was some time before he mustered up spirit to resume his adventures. His room seemed to have vanished, as it had been at the nod of an Arabian genie; and it was obvious that he could not wander about, visiting every chamber in the hope of hitting upon it. He could only trust that dawn would come soon and bring sufficient light to point the way. He thought he could tell by his boots. Everything seemed to turn on boots or shoes that night. If it had not been for a shoe, he would not have been in this predicament, and a boot would save him now.

Near the end of the corridor toward the north he suddenly noticed that a door was ajar. It had evidently not been properly shut, and he wondered if by any

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chance this could be his room. As he had given chase to the intruder he had probably let the door go behind him, and it had fallen to, but the latch had not caught. Now he looked on his environment, he began to be sure that he was right in conjecturing this to be his bedroom. To begin with, no one else would leave a door open; and, then, there was a window opposite, and the elms were visible from there also. He summoned all his courage up and pushed the door wider open. He listened. No noise of a sleeper came to him, but all was pitch dark. He wondered why the moon should have gone so rapidly. After a moment's pause he groped his way very carefully forward, but met with nothing to impede his progress. His bed should be to the right somewhere, and he deflected his course. He went with his hands outstretched before him, and presently these encountered a bar. It must be the washing stand, he thought, and pushed a little farther, fell against something, clutched at it, and recovered himself. The next moment there was a loud crash of pots and bottles falling together, something trickling warmly over his ankles, and the odor of mingling preserves and pickles assailed his nostrils.

Bannatyne extricated himself with a confusion of senses and a profusion of words; and he was hardly again at the door when a tall manservant, in his nightshirt, holding a candle, met him.

"Who's this in the still-room? Now, then!" he cried threateningly, and then he recognized Bannatyne.

Bannatyne also recognized his friend of two hours back, and could have wept with joy. "You are my

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guardian angel," he declared, and demanded his name gratefully. It was Braddock.

"Well, Braddock, the measure of my thanks shall be made known on the morrow. In the meantime lead me to my bed. I have lived through more terrors this night than it becomes any man to boast of. I hope you do know where I sleep?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, sir," said Braddock reassuringly, and led the way.

Bannatyne could hardly keep his eyes open. Secure in his room, he nodded dismissal to the man, and would almost have fallen on his bed in his dressing gown. He shambled out of it, turned off the light once more, and rolled himself up in the sheet. Hardly had he done so when he was asleep, his crimes forgotten, and his shame not even a memory.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROSERY

WHEN Bannatyne awoke the sun was streaming into the courtyard, and westward the park stretched cool and green in its shadows toward the Chantry Woods. As he dressed in a leisurely manner after his bath, his eye, roaming over the intermediate pleasaunce, happened upon Gladys on the lawn under his window. She had emerged from the shrubberies beyond and had a purposeful air which was also somewhat furtive. Hastily throwing on his coat, he went down to meet her. The girl's face broadened with a smile of polite welcome as he approached.

"Oh, how nice to see you, Mr. Bannatyne!" said she in accents which were quite conventional and young-ladylike. "Mamma told me you were coming."

He kissed her finger tips, as the poet kissed Maud's slender hands.

"I couldn't stay away, Gladys. I tried hard, but the attempt broke down. There are so many attractions here," and he shook his head sadly.

Gladys eyed him with thoughtful diffidence. "Do you think Miss Arden pretty?" she asked abruptly. "I think she's just lovely."

"So do I, so do I," he agreed cordially—"as sweet as she is pretty, and as pretty as she is sweet."

“Do you think she’s prettier than Miss Grant-Summers?” pursued the girl. “You do, don’t you, Mr. Bannatyne?”

“Stars differ from one another in glory,” he said evasively. “But I must have a good look at them again, from a respectful distance, of course.”

“Miss Arden’s got such beautiful hair,” said Gladys enthusiastically. “I do so like that color—don’t you?”

“All colors, my dear Gladys,” said he—“all the colors of the rainbow.”

“Oh, Mr. Bannatyne!” cried Gladys in protest and horror.

“Of course not necessarily in hair,” he added quickly. “What have you got there, child?”

Gladys hastily moved her hand so that it was buried in the folds of her holland dress. Her face was slightly suffused with pink, and she displayed a little embarrassment.

“Oh, it’s only something I found. I’ve been——”

“Not—not a shoe?” he demanded, all alert.

“No,” said Miss Gladys, staring at him in surprise.

“No, I didn’t really find it, but I picked it. I mean——”

She was so very prim and proper, standing before him thus, long-legged, in immaculate hollands, with a broad mushroom hat, and long fair hair flowing over her shoulders. This was not quite the Gladys he had known before. The shadow of adolescence had fallen on her; she was near the prison gates. She had picked green apples, thought Bannatyne, and was ashamed of her appetite. Across her fourteen years the woman strove

with the child; and was it possible that the former would conquer merely because so old a friend happened to be a man? It seemed wrong. He would evoke the child.

"My dear Gladys," Bannatyne said reassuringly, "I know you'll give yourself a pain, but I really don't mind. I did it, too, and I had pains—awful pains. I assure you," and here he sat down on a garden seat: "No one in the house will mind if you have a pain. So produce and eat, O daughter of Eve, forthright."

"It isn't anything to eat," said Gladys reluctantly. He patted the seat near him by way of invitation, and she accepted, sliding modestly into position. "It's—it's only some thorns."

"Thorns? For crackling under a pot?" he asked politely.

"No, no," said Gladys doubtfully, and her face was now quite red. "It's for—for Mr. Lock."

"Does Mr. Lock like thorns?" said Bannatyne, puzzled.

Gladys tittered a little; the shadows of the future seemed to have vanished.

"No; that's just it," she confessed, and went on more quickly, and as if unburdening herself. "He *is* so horrid. He just stares at me as if I weren't there, and I meant to have put burrs in his bed last night, but I didn't, and so I'm going to put these—" Gladys hesitated, as if awakened to recollections of propriety; but her face was beaming; the sunlight of childhood was radiant about her. She fumbled with something in her lap.

"On Mr. Lock's chair," suggested Bannatyne gravely.

Gladys shifted uneasily, and as if expecting a reproof, but none came. Instead, her companion seized her arm. "Gladys, child," he said distressfully, "who is that lady walking toward us? And can I get away in time without her seeing me?"

Gladys glanced her sharp, untrammelled glance across the lawn. "It's Miss Ashcroft," she said. "Why?"

"Do you think there's room for me under the seat?" he inquired. "Oh, if you could only hide me, Gladys! I don't feel very well."

Gladys looked at him in bewilderment to see if he were in fun or serious, and could not determine. She liked Mr. Bannatyne very much. He understood her, and she would have liked to understand him; but it was difficult. He rose and sauntered away with a negligent air, and she followed.

"You see, my child," he explained in a low voice, "it is as well to accept the inevitable—not to kick against the pricks; and when a trouble has got to come, it may just as well be faced—meeting it, indeed, halfway is sometimes the best expedient. Good morning," he broke off, lifting his hat to a lady, who had arrived within saluting distance.

She was between forty and fifty, had a cool eye and the appearance of self-possession, and she was dressed rather individually than fashionably.

"Good morning," she returned to the greeting. "Good morning, Gladys, my dear. Have you been gathering roses for your cheeks?"

"If you are really wise you will always be careful to

avoid thorns when picking roses," said Bannatyne to the girl paternally. "All roses have thorns, but not necessarily all thorns have roses."

"There does not seem very much sense in that statement," remarked Miss Ashcroft bluntly.

"I did not intend there should be any," replied he with dignity.

Miss Ashcroft pursed her lips up, but made no reply to that. She swung round and surveyed the garden, on which a brilliant sun was shining. It was between eight and nine, and all the freshness of a summer morning was still in the fine air. Masses of lumbering white clouds were rolling in a windy sky through space as blue as the fastnesses of the deep sea; they were climbing the breast of the downs to the south, and streamed across the valley like the banners of an invading army.

"Where do you keep your roses, child?" inquired Miss Ashcroft.

"The rose garden's through here," said Gladys, returned to her prim propriety, and led the way. Bannatyne, out of sheer defiance, or at least despair, followed in Miss Ashcroft's wake. They walked along a broad gravel path, passed through an arch in an old brick wall, and entered the rosery. Miss Ashcroft paused appreciatively in front of bush after bush, and Bannatyne wretchedly paused with her, offering such remarks as occurred to him.

"That's a very fine grown Caroline Testout," said Miss Ashcroft critically. She was a gardener of great knowledge and taste. "Ah, I see you've protected your

Niphetoses properly! Your man knows his work. Probably the very best all-round rose is Viscountess Folkstone. It's all rubbish about the Gloire de Dijon." She looked Bannatyne full in the face, as if she expected him to contradict her, but he was not in the mood to do so. Was she ever going to speak, or had she ignored it? Perhaps she was that noble and impossible thing, a generous woman? But, of course, it was only because of Gladys.

"Is it really?" was all he said politely.

"Now, I'm a grower," went on Miss Ashcroft, "and Sir Edward Coombe isn't. But there's more taste in a rosery like this than in twenty ordinary growers' beds. They are show-mad, point-mad. Not but what I set store by real proper points. I will point a rose with any."

"I have no doubt you would," said Bannatyne with earnest conviction.

"But some roses are unaccountably neglected by growers and gardeners both," continued Miss Ashcroft, riding her hobby. "There's no accounting for tastes. This, for example," and she paused beside a bush—"this Gloire Lyonnaise."

Again she fixed Bannatyne with her cool, masterful eye, and again he met it with polite attention. She turned away a little abruptly, as if that was not quite what she had expected, and as she did so Bannatyne let his gaze drop on the bush she had indicated. His interest was arrested at once.

It bore roses like that which he had found the night before and which was still blooming in his bedroom.

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"It is certainly a beautiful flower," he observed, eying it keenly. Miss Ashcroft was eying him as keenly.

"Of course there is nothing in a name," she said, "and I suppose a rose by any other name *would* smell as sweet. But names are necessary to identification. Hence we have such monstrosities in nomenclature as Ulrich Brunner, Susan Anne Rodocanachi, and Mrs. W. J. Grant."

"I like Gloire Lyonnaise," said Bannatyne.

"You have good taste," said Miss Ashcroft, "and I have no doubt Gladys will give you one in reward for it."

"I should like one very much," said he, and looked wistfully at the girl. She glanced from one to the other of her companions in some bewilderment. She felt vaguely that they were talking as adults will talk on the verge of nothing which is something, and she was doubtful if there was a jest between them. On the whole, she thought that there was, and a smile trembled on her lips as she looked at the faces, the lady's contained and matter-of-fact, the man's whimsical and changeful. Bannatyne's smile decided her. She giggled prettily, and stooped to cut a rose, which he took with a graceful "leg," and set in his buttonhole.

"I should like a constant supply of these," he asserted to Miss Ashcroft. "I should like a fresh one every morning, plucked in the dew of dawn by fairy fingers just like Gladys's," he added.

Gladys laughed again.

"But I must warn you, Mr. Bannatyne, that the

Gloire Lyonnaise has one fault," said Miss Ashcroft. "It is shy. It is constant, but shy. It blooms consistently, and never varies from that brilliant virginity of color. It is faithful to itself; but it is not a free flowerer."

"I value it all the more," said he, dipping his nose in the full petals. "But—" he hesitated. "Do you think—would you speak of it as virgin in color?" He looked doubtful.

Miss Ashcroft shot him a glance and bit her underlip pensively.

"Color, like beauty," she remarked, "resides in the eye of the beholder, and clarity of color also. I did not say it was virgin white."

Bannatyne was looking at his rose critically, and Gladys was watching first one and then the other with a puzzled expression on her face. She would have much liked to know what they were talking about; but it seemed to be only about a silly old rose.

"Do you know," he observed, "I think I like a taint of color. White innocence is charming, but it palls—doesn't it, Gladys? I'm not sure I don't prefer a cloudiness, a flaw in the crystal, something that balks perfection. Bacon remarked very sensibly that there is no beauty without some strangeness in its proportion. Thus beauty cannot be common, since it would not be strange, and virginity of color cannot be beautiful since it is common." He paused. "But is it? We affect that it is. Is it?" He held up the rose to her.

"You have a remarkable breadth of view," said Miss

Ashcroft in her bluntest tone. "But I'm not sure if you're not morbid. I'm going to breakfast."

She walked off with her vigorous stride as she said this, leaving Bannatyne with Gladys.

"We, too, might go to breakfast," said the man pensively, gazing after Miss Ashcroft. "I have something that gnaws at my vitals. Gladys, will you swear you haven't eaten any green apples? If it weren't broad daylight, and I were not fat and old, I would race you to the doors."

Gladys laughed. "Oh, Mr. Bannatyne!" she said, expostulating; "you're *not* fat and old."

"Am I not?" he said hopefully. "Do you really think not? You encourage me. What grounds have you for saying I am neither fat nor old?"

"Why, you're not more than about forty or forty-five—perhaps fifty," said Gladys with an air of confidence, "and people aren't really old till they get to be seventy—threescore and ten, you know, when they rot away."

"Dear me, you foreshadow a most unpleasant end!" said Bannatyne. "Rot away!"

"That's what it says—their bones, you know," explained Gladys in her superior way.

"Oh," said he, watching Miss Ashcroft in the distance, "I'm sure, if we don't hurry, that lady will eat all the breakfast! Didn't you see her eyes? She's an ogress. She wanted to devour me, and you too, but particularly me. Never mind, we have survived. Give me your hand, child, and we'll go home in triumph. I wonder how much the ogress knows."

"Knows!" repeated Gladys.

"Yes; ogresses often know a great deal, and I think this one is diabolically clever. I can't make head or tail of her—can you? Lucky for you I was with you, wasn't it? Women are all humbugs, all except you, Gladys, and you are not a woman yet. When you are, you'll be a humbug."

"No, indeed I won't!" declared the girl indignantly.

"Oh, yes you will, my dear—one of the worst. I know it. You're all alike. You can't help yourselves. I don't blame you. Please don't think I blame you. It's natural in you, just as natural as a dog scratching himself for fleas."

Gladys giggled, and they ascended the steps to the house.

Half the house party had breakfasted, and they entered to find eight or ten people scattered about the big table in the room that fronted the lawns. Lady Coombe sat at the top, surrounded by various silver urns, which, however, she made no attempt to use, that work being left to the servants. She was talking vivaciously with Ferris and Bouverie.

Mrs. Everard Battye, handsome and statuesque, was pensively sipping her tea when Bannatyne sat down by her side. Gladys had already breakfasted, and melted away on some mysterious errand of her own. *Hippolyta* acknowledged Bannatyne's arrival with a gracious smile.

"Beautiful morning," she said sweetly.

"Ecstatic," said he. "Delight fades into delight, as

night into day, like those dissolving views of our childhood—my childhood, I mean,” he corrected himself, with an appreciative and almost furtive look at the lady. It was that genuine combination of shyness with almost outrageous audacity that made part of Bannatyne’s irresistible charm. Mrs. Everard Battye turned toward him with an excess of warmth in her manner.

“Oh, I remember them,” said she graciously.

“Do you?” He looked doubtful. “I believe you’re pretending. You’re making yourself out older than you are on purpose with some abominable design, I’m sure. Why, that would make you at least six-and-twenty.”

She laughed. “I’ve been married for eight years,” said she.

“Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself,” he retorted quickly. “At least, your guardians ought to be ashamed of themselves. Why, you ought not to be married now—hardly, that is.” He gave her one of his shy glances and then dropped his eyes. “And, of course, to the right man.”

The color sparkled in her face. “It is always the right man,” she said lightly. “Isn’t it?”

“No one ever makes any mistakes,” he assured her. “That is the solemn truth.”

“Naturally,” said the lady with obvious levity. She hung heavily; she did not slide into these exchanges gracefully or with sufficient ease. She offered no play of passadoes. But she was beautiful.

“Icily regular, splendidly null,” thought Bannatyne to himself. What a seraglio! If he had been Lady

Coombe he would have hesitated long before collecting in one house so many handsome women, unless, of course, he had been as sure of himself as perhaps Lady Coombe was of herself.

He was arrested in these thoughts, as he ate, by Bouverie's voice. "We ought to be playing 'Hamlet,' instead of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' I'll give you my word, ghosts walk in the western corridor. I heard 'em."

"Oh, but we've no tradition of ghosts in Temple Hall," said Lady Coombe. "It couldn't be."

"I heard 'em," said Bouverie with slow solemnity, "from about one o'clock to half past two. They simply raced about the corridor. If I hadn't been too frightened I'd have got up with my revolver."

"I heard something, too," said some one across the table; "but I thought it was cats."

"I heard some one," declared Miss Merrington; "and it stopped in front of my door, and I was afraid it was coming in."

"Ghosts!" Bouverie assured her, wagging his head.

"There are no ghosts here," said Lady Coombe plaintively.

"It turned the handle of my door," put in Bannatyne's neighbor, Mrs. Everard Battye, "but, of course, it was locked."

"Ghosts don't mind about locks," said Bouverie. "It probably changed its mind, and went on. But I think it came to a bad end, for I heard a lot of bottles go over."

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"I know it was cats," said the speaker across the table.

"It was neither ghosts nor cats," said the decisive voice of Miss Ashcroft, "for I saw it."

"You saw it!" rose in an interested chorus.

Bannatyne fumbled with the marmalade. "Won't you have some jam?" he asked confusedly. "This is really good jam. Please, Miss Ashcroft, may I——"

Her cool eyes wandered over him. "No, thank you," she said, and, picking up the eyes of the table, proceeded: "I saw it quite plainly—as you may say, face to face."

"It has come at last—the curse is come upon me," murmured Bannatyne with a sigh. "But what a devilish revenge! She is an ogress." The table was waiting on the narrative.

"Will you try this jam?" said the unhappy Bannatyne to his companion, whose eyes and ears were for Miss Ashcroft only. She did not even notice his question.

"About two in the morning, as nearly as I could make out," went on Miss Ashcroft, "my door was opened suddenly——"

"Oh, it did go in somewhere, then?" interjected Bouverie.

"And I lit a candle hastily, and found myself in the presence of a"—a breathless pause ensued—"a man," said Miss Ashcroft, deliberately calm.

"Good heavens!" cried Lady Coombe in distress.

Mrs. Everard Battye looked much interested, and

two of the girls drew in their breath. Peter Bouverie contemplated the speaker gravely. Bannatyne whistled inaudibly and rapped his fingers softly on the table.

"The intruder offered no violence," pursued the lady. "He simply remained where he was."

"But what did you do?" asked Ferris, "or what did he do? How did you get rid of him?"

"Yes, do let us get to the point," urged Bouverie. "Was it a burglar?"

"No, it was no burglar. It was some one staying in the house," said Miss Ashcroft.

Bannatyne now was looking across at her with level eyes, and their glances met. He raised the lapel of his coat, and drew in the fragrance of the rose.

"Some one staying in the house!" cried Lady Coombe.

Bouverie pursed up his lips and raised his eyebrows. It was clear all were waiting for the next words which would clear up the mystery and reveal a "sensation."

"But his name I refuse to disclose," continued Miss Ashcroft equably, "as the unfortunate man was not responsible for his actions."

"Not responsible! You mean he was drunk?" inquired Bouverie. "That would explain his falling over my boots twice."

"No, not drunk," said Miss Ashcroft thoughtfully, "though I won't say he had not drunk as much as was wise for him. No; his condition was otherwise and readily discernible."

"Do tell us what was the matter with him," said

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Bannatyne's clear, musical voice, for the first time breaking silence. Miss Ashcroft looked at him.

"He was walking in his sleep," she said, "and so it would not be fair to give his name."

"What a shame!" murmured Bannatyne feebly, and to himself. "A magnificent revenge! I've suffered tortures; and she's got me on the hooks still. It's enough to drive a man to suicide!"

A general feeling of disappointment pervaded the table, mingled with an increasing curiosity. Bouverie looked over at Ferris, and Ferris looked at Bouverie. Both looked at Bannatyne and young Gay.

"It wasn't me," said Bouverie presently. "Please clear my character, Miss Ashcroft. It couldn't have been me, for I heard it fall over my boots."

"My dear fellow, you say so," said Bannatyne.

"I'm going to clear no one's character," said Miss Ashcroft with determination.

"Well, we'll all clear our own," said Bannatyne lightly. "It wasn't me who was sleep-walking."

"Nor me!" from Ferris.

"Nor me!" from young Gay.

"I believe it was Hancock," said Peter Bouverie. "He's worried himself so that he can't sleep. Let's go and accuse Hancock."

Bouverie rose and pushed back his chair, and his example was followed by several others, including Bannatyne. The latter, walking round the table toward the long French windows that opened upon the lawn, encountered Lady Merrington, who beamed upon him.

"Isn't it a pity," said she with her pretty little brogue, "that Miss Ashcroft won't tell us who the sleep-walker was?"

"I am perishing of curiosity," he said, and exchanged a long glance with Miss Ashcroft herself, who came up at that moment.

"It is not well to be too inquisitive," said she, pausing to deliver her homily. "It is not good for woman, and certainly not for man, who has less to plead in excuse for him. You have now had a moral lesson in self-restraint. Exercise it, Mr. Bannatyne. Curb your curiosity. Let the poor somnambulist rest unashamed. See! I set you an example, for I have a secret, and keep it."

"Ah, but there it is," said he lightly. "You know. The rest of us——"

"Must find out, if you can. I ask you to spare," she interrupted bluffly, and went out.

"Perhaps it wouldn't be kind to poke fun at the poor man," observed Lady Merrington, who seemed to have been impressed by these exchanges. "I think it's Mr. Lock. You see, they wouldn't know they did it. And he looks as if he walked by night."

"He has a distinct moonlight effect," agreed Bannatyne as they parted.

He passed the cedars and deodars on the lawn and wandered toward the pleached alley. The party was scattered throughout the spreading gardens, and he could hear voices in the distance, and the smell of tobacco came to him. Overhead the great white clouds still

billowed through blue space, and the morning air was invigorating like wine. He breathed in the fragrance of the day.

He confessed himself a little frightened of Miss Ashcroft. She was too alarmingly assertive. How much did she know? That she knew a good deal was obvious. Clearly she had been ignorant when he broke into her room early in the morning, so that she must have learned something since. What, and from whom? He could surely trust his eyes, and they had told him of a form that fled before his pursuit, and vanished near by Miss Ashcroft's room. Miss Ashcroft, then, must have had speech with the fluttered Daphne. There was the episode of the rosebush, which was unmistakable, and she had hardly taken the trouble to veil her references. She admonished him, nay, even threatened him. She had taken sides against him. Clearly, then, she knew the Dryad. That was satisfactory, so far. Some one else was in the secret, which made it easier for him to unravel. His investigations must operate round Miss Ashcroft and her room. He had marked that room, though, of course, it would be easy enough to identify by inquiry. Yet he preferred his own detective methods. He might open the campaign at any moment now, but somehow he did not want to begin. He shrank from it. Miss Ashcroft, he admitted to himself, had scared him. No, he would not visit the east wing at present.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROYAL COMMISSION

As Bannatyne emerged from the pleached alley he was hailed across a broad bed of peonies.

"Coming to the village, Bannatyne?"

It was Hancock, his soft hat tilted on his head, a cigar between his teeth, his hands in his pockets, and his round red face beaconing good temper.

"It's no good," said Peter Bouverie from behind him. "It's not Hancock; look at his face. It couldn't be."

"What couldn't be, and what isn't Hancock?" growled the owner of that name pleasantly enough.

"The somnambulist," said Bouverie.

"The somnambulist!" repeated Hancock, and removed the cigar from his mouth. "Look here, you people seem to think this is fun we're engaged on, and that you are at liberty to joke your way through it. Let me disabuse your minds, or what you're pleased to call your minds. It isn't. It's downright serious hard work, and hard labor's nothing to it. I'm going forthwith to the village to see if we can beat up a *Bottom* on Bannatyne's suggestion."

"Oh, we'll all come. We're all interested in having a suitable *Bottom*," declared Bouverie.

The three strolled away through the gardens and

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issued into the park, when they came upon a young man sauntering along the borders of the stream.

"Come on, Gay," said Bouverie; "we're looking for a *Bottom* for you."

Gay joined them with becoming dignity, and attached himself to Bannatyne. He was clean-shaven, and somewhat broad and pink of face, and his accent was markedly individual. He gave values to every syllable in the most refined Oxford manner.

"Don't you think the cast is rather absurd, Mr. Bannatyne?" he inquired after some preliminaries.

"You are referring to me," said Bannatyne in a depressed voice. "My dear Mr. Gay, you're quite right. But what was I to do? The part was distributed to me in my absence. I had no voice in it."

"No, indeed, no; I was not thinking of you in the least!" said young Gay hurriedly. "Indeed, I was thinking of myself partly. You see, I play *Snout*."

Bannatyne raised his eyebrows. "*Snout*!" he repeated.

"Yes, don't you think—well, *Snout*, you know." Gay laughed shortly and bitterly. "It's rather hard to be playing *Snout*. It isn't so much that the part hasn't any fat in it, don't you know—one doesn't mind that. One takes one's place for the general good of the company, so to speak. But to be a person called *Snout*! Well, it's too ridiculous, you know— isn't it?"

Bannatyne agreed that it was very trying, but endeavored to cheer the young man's drooping spirits ineffectually.

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"Naturally one doesn't wish to spoil sport," said Gay. "But I think Mr. Hancock might have found some other part for me. I really shouldn't mind playing *Bottom*, now, if—if it was considered desirable."

"But *Bottom*! Oh, come, *Bottom*!" said Bannatyne with distaste. "'Scratch my head, *Peas-blossom*.' I don't quite see you in the part, Mr. Gay."

"Well, of course, one wouldn't really wish it," explained Gay. "But one would be willing to sacrifice one's own individual feelings for the sake of the general company. And it really seems to me, if you don't mind my saying so, absurd to think of getting a common villager to play the part."

"So it is," agreed Bannatyne cordially. "Monstrously absurd. But Hancock will do it. Of course, my suggestion was meant as a joke."

"So I gathered," said young Gay eagerly. "Of course, I recognized that you saw it was impossible. I really wonder at Mr. Hancock."

"Let's, at any rate, save him from what blunders we can," urged Bannatyne. "He's going round the village now— No, Bouverie, I refuse to go through that wood. It's haunted."

He had raised his voice, seeing that Bouverie was turning up a path which made for the Wilderness. Bouverie paused.

"All right," he said. "You speak so seriously I cannot doubt you. We'll go through the Silver Wood."

So saying he turned about, and, crossing a green-sward, they passed up by the stream into some meadows

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and then by a gate into a cool dark patch of wood, which neighbored fields of gray-green corn, dancing in the morning sun.

"I believe there's a humorist at the wheelwright's," said Bouverie when they reached the pretty village with its tiled cottages. "Shall we try him?"

Hancock looked doubtful. "I'm rather afraid of your professional humorists," he said. "What I really want is a quick study—a man with a memory, who will do what I tell him."

"Memory's a very easy matter," murmured Gay in Bannatyne's ears.

"I vote we start with him, at any rate," said Bouverie. "This is a royal commission appointed by her Majesty *Queen Titania* to discover *Bottom*. He might be the wheelwright."

Hancock yielded, and they moved down the street to the wheelwright's. Mr. Atfield received them in the open front of his workshop, rotund and dark and short. He saluted the gentry politely.

"Very busy, Mr. Atfield?" began Hancock affably.

"I can't complain, sir," said the wheelwright, "though it's mostly hot work this weather."

"Hot work?" said Bouverie, interrupting.

"There's so much tiring to do, sir," explained Atfield. "Why, this morning, first thing, I had to fire twenty tires and set 'em. Not but what it might be considered good practice by some people," he ended with a grin.

"Talking of practice," said Bannatyne, "are you ac-

quainted with the words of Mr. Shakespeare, Mr. Atfield?"

The wheelwright shifted his feet and glanced at them somewhat uneasily. "Of course, I've often seen 'em," he said with some dignity. "I've got a copy of 'em in my house—what my boy reads."

"'The Midsummer Night's Dream'?" asked Bouverie.

Mr. Atfield took his time to reply. "I don't know about that," he remarked noncommittally. "But maybe."

"I wanted to know if you've a good memory, Mr. Atfield," said Hancock insinuatingly. "Can you get things off by heart quickly?"

The wheelwright pondered. "Not what you might call very quick," he said, "but moderate fair. My boy's got a good memory, he have."

"Do you think you could act a part in a play, Mr. Atfield?" inquired Bouverie.

"I don't know," said the wheelwright, shaking his head. "I've never tried, to my knowing."

"Well, the fact is," took up Hancock, "Lady Coombe's giving a performance of one of Shakespeare's plays up at the Hall in a few days, and we wondered if you could take a part in it. Only it is essential that you should get up the part at once."

Gratification was apparent in the wheelwright's smile, which broadened over his face.

"It's very kind, I'm sure, sir," said he. "I couldn't be certain that I could. I've seen acting—good acting,

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in my time, but I dunno that I could act myself. It's very kind of you, gentlemen, all the same."

"Well, suppose you have a shot at it, eh?" said Hancock, and whispered to Bannatyne. "It can't be worse this way than it is at present."

"Much obliged, sir," said the wheelwright doubtfully.

"You see, we want you to play *Bottom*," persisted Hancock.

The wheelwright stared. "*Bottom!*" he repeated. "You want me to play *Bottom*?"

"Yes, *Bottom*, who wears an ass's head, you know, in the play," said Bouverie encouragingly.

The wheelwright's glance sidled off to him, and suspicion dwelt in it.

"Wears an ass's head!" he said with rising intonation.

"And lies in the lap of the fairy queen," interjected Bannatyne.

He, too, was now engaged by the darkling eye. They were evidently all in a conspiracy together. Atfield's indignation, which had been slowly growing, was now over-ripe. He retreated with dignity into his shop and took up a plane.

"*Bottom!*" he said with a snort between his planing. "Wears an ass's head, does he? and sits in a woman's lap, does he?" He laughed a hard, grim laugh. "You gentlemen better go home. Time you did; the morning isn't for jokes like them."

"But it isn't a joke; it's dead earnest," declared Hancock.

The wheelwright snorted and cackled. He continued to plane viciously. "You gentlemen better go home and rest a bit," he said. "It be plain the sun be affectin' your heads. I can stand a joke, aye, and make a joke, too, with anyone; but things can be took too far. *Bottom*! Layin' in a lady's lap! There's no sense in any of that talk. 'Tisn't respectable, that it isn't! I don't want to play no *Bottom*, layin' in a lady's lap. Humph! Sims to me one or t'other of you gentlemen best play *Bottom* yourselves." The wheelwright, struck by this idea and the humor of it, paused in his work and directed a glance toward them. He opened his mouth and laughed satirically at the discomfited party.

"Sims to me as one o' you gentlemen best play 'im," he repeated. "Sims to me as the part would suit one o' you. Sims to me as you'd like it, layin' with your heads in a lady's lap!" he said with derisive emphasis. "I ain't got no time, nor yet fancy, to waste on a *Bottom* and ladies' laps. Sims to me you better play 'im yourselves," he called out loudly and more derisively after the retreating party, and his mocking laughter followed them.

"He had us there," said Bouverie sadly, as in despondency they walked down the street.

"He misunderstood us," said Bannatyne with dignity.

"Heavens! to think of a prime part with all the fat going begging like this!" apostrophized Hancock. "Even despised by the hinds! I shall have to send that telegram to London."

"Hancock speaks as if it was a sheep, and he a

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butcher," remarked Bannatyne. "But don't let's be downhearted. Let's try the cobbler. Cobblers have always individualities. A cobbler would solve a theory of the universe in the desert of Sahara, and it would be heretical." He looked at the sign of the shop by which they had halted. "'Cooper.' Good! Now for inquiry. Is Mr. Cooper in?"

For answer, a man of medium height, medium age, and heavy build came to the door. He wore a brown leathern apron, and his fattish face, ornamented with mutton-chop whiskers, beamed on them in a friendly way.

"We are a deputation from Lady Coombe," began Bannatyne courteously, "who is producing the pastoral play of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' and has heard that you would fill the part of bully *Bottom* admirably. We have come to see if we cannot persuade you to take the part."

The cobbler took the spectacles off his nose and looked round at them in surprise, but at the end of his inspection his face was wreathed in smiles.

"It seems funny like, comin' like this, gentlemen," said he. "Come in.—Mother!" he called with a burr, "bring another chair for the gentlemen.—Sit down, gentlemen; sit down, please." He beamed on Bannatyne, and then shone upon Bouverie, finally brightening on Hancock.

"Now can we persuade you?" asked Bouverie cozeningly.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," said the cobbler, beaming. "It's funny like. I never thought of such things.

"I reckon it's pretty hard work, sir?" he added, addressing Hancock.

"No, very easy," said that gentleman promptly—"always supposing you're a good hand at getting things up."

"That would be learning it off, like," said the cobbler, and perpended. "I'm sure I don't know, sir. I dare say I might learn it off. I was always pretty good at learning by rote, like."

"The leading performers are paid two guineas for their services," said Bannatyne mendaciously.

The cobbler smiled more broadly. "I should like to try it, sir, if there wouldn't be no objection, like, to trying."

"We can only try," said Bouverie sententiously, "and if we fail, we fail."

"I shouldn't like to fail, sir," said the cobbler. "When I take a thing in hand I like to carry it through, I doos. But perhaps the gentlemen will tell us a little more about it, like. You said *Bottom*, sir. Is that a leading character, like?"

"One of the most important," said Bouverie.

"Is it—is it a love character, as you might say, sir?"

"Well," said Bouverie critically, "in a way it might be so considered, but from another point of view perhaps not. The fairy queen falls in love with you."

The cobbler's grin returned, and its radiance fell upon the circle. "Fancy that, sir!" he said, chuckling. "Perhaps the missus might object. There's no knowin' how women will take on."

“Well, do you feel disposed to assent?” inquired Hancock.

The cobbler hesitated. “If I thought I could manage it,” he began diffidently.

“Oh, you mustn’t be too modest; no actor is,” said Hancock.

“Well, it’s more about the learnin’ of it off,” said the cobbler. “Is there much of it, sir?”

“A fair amount; but we’ll leave you the part, and you can try your hand. You can easily get it up during your work. Keep the book open before you—so—and in the intervals of hammering nails in you can read the lines.”

The cobbler listened and nodded. “I dare say I can do it, sir. When I was a boy, like, I was a great hand at repeating poetry. I could say the whole of ‘Alas, poor little Jim!’ and things like that easy. It worn’t no trouble to me, sir. Oh, no, I believe I has a good memory.”

“Then we will put you down,” cried Hancock heartily, “and we will leave you this book to study from; the passages are marked. And we shall expect you to a rehearsal this afternoon, at four o’clock. Is that agreed, Mr. Cooper?”

The cobbler’s face had grown anxious, but he manfully assented, and then made a suggestion.

“I suppose there isn’t a song, like, in the part, sir? I be pretty good at a song. Never a year goes but I sings one of my songs at the Cricket supper, ’long of the inn there. I knows that one:

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“ ‘Tis my delight of a zhoiny noight
Of the zeazon of the year.’

‘Tain’t my best, but it’s a rare good ‘un.”

Hancock kept his face, and Bouverie and Bannatyne were preternaturally grave.

“ If we can find room for it, rely upon me, Cooper,” said the former; “ I will see what can be done. In the meantime, remember and be punctual.”

The cobbler touched his hair to them as they went out, and beamed after them, respectfully alert and brisk and debonair. The three (for Gay had not accompanied them on their second quest) moved in the direction of the Hall.

“ We have accomplished a hard task skillfully,” said Bouverie, “ and are entitled to a little refreshment. It is very hot.”

“ I’ll tell you what it is,” confided Hancock, mopping his rubicund face, “ that’s the real thing. We couldn’t have done better. It is *Bottom*. Oh, it’s great!”

“ He’ll take all the shine out of me,” said Bannatyne moodily.

“ Oh, you’re not on the stage with him. I am,” said Bouverie. “ I shall have to sing small.”

“ No, but you don’t understand,” said Bannatyne. “ I want to bulk large. *Lysander* is to my mind the most important character in the play. The whole plot hinges on him and——”

“ How absurd!” interposed Bouverie with his deliberate voice. “ It is obvious to anyone with the intellect

of a bird, that the chief part is *Oberon*, the director of the destinies of mortal and immortal alike."

"I refuse to discuss this matter with you, if you lose your temper like that," said Bannatyne. "No; I won't go with you to the inn. I don't like your company. Good-by."

He came to a halt, and, waving a hand each, Bouverie and Hancock jogged over to the inn. Bannatyne, however, turned about and directed his steps to an avenue of limes on one side of the village, which gave access to the park beyond. He roamed up this by a right-of-way to the heath, and stood for a quarter of an hour admiring the legions of white clouds that advanced in heaven. The sunshine was blown about the heath, and the hills at the back of the landscape were alternately in shadow or under a brilliant blaze of light, the dark of the everlasting pines mingling in the ridges with the brighter green of oaks and larches and beeches.

Bannatyne took out his watch, and found it was near twelve o'clock. He would just have time to go round by the warren and through the gates before lunch. By that time, too, he would have recovered sufficiently to resume offensive operations against Miss Ashcroft and the unknown. Already he felt the desire for battle welling up in him. The Dryad had deliberately and wantonly challenged him by her theft of her shoe; she had thrown down the gage of battle. Well, he would take it up. With these reflections he turned his back on the long valley streaming with light, and started up the ascent which

led to the warren. At the entrance he caught sight of a figure leaning over the gate. It was a slender white figure, with an unadorned Panama hat adroitly and becomingly adjusted. This he could make out from afar, and presently he arrived near enough to see that it was Lady Cynthia. She had her back to him; otherwise she would almost appear to have been waiting for him. As it was, his first words caused her to start and swing round on him.

"Mr. Bannatyne!" she exclaimed, with a flush in her cheeks.

"I'm glad I've caught you. I've been chasing you for two hours," said he.

The girl looked at him frankly. "I've only been out for an hour," she said. "You could have found me in the house. Why did you want me?"

She was as innocent of any coquetry as a child, and merely expected some communication from Lady Coombe or her mother which this extravagant man had been enlisted to carry. He gave her his shy smile.

"I couldn't stand the society of Bouverie and Hancock any longer," he explained. "They wanted to take me into a low public house. They're probably drinking there still. I don't suppose we shall see them all day. They'll probably turn up in an awful condition to-night."

Lady Cynthia laughed softly, and turned her attention to what she had been looking at before his arrival.

"Is it the hills, Lady Cynthia?" he asked, following her gaze.

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The sun was on the long limbs of the pine-clad hills, and over them was the distant shadow of the downs that slept by the sea.

"No; farther," said she. She pointed to the horizon. "Aren't they beautiful? It seems so wonderful to look right across the weald and see them."

" 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help,' " quoted Bannatyne. "People who live in flat lands must have drab minds."

"They have the stars," said Lady Cynthia.

"True, they have the stars," he assented. "They have illimitable space, if they choose to see it. But how many human eyes carry so far? Like the philosopher in the 'Clouds,' they keep their gaze earthward. That is why," he added with a wave of his hand toward the south, "the hill triumphs. That must strike the eye. Infinity is too great for most of us, but we can measure a mile."

She was looking across the landscape, in an abstraction, and the cool breeze played with her skirt and blew ruffles in her bodice. Bannatyne turned his attention from the view to her, and approved the symmetry of that slim form.

Lady Cynthia, with a little sigh of pleasure, abandoned the view and began to walk on; he followed into the wood.

"Were you successful?" she asked presently.

"Do you mean, did we secure a *Bottom*? We did. Hancock promises him to be a star, which makes me feel very jealous. I don't want to be outshone by a star."

"I thought it was only women who were like that," said she, smiling.

He shook his head sadly. "Give men a chance, and they will discover as much vanity to a square inch as any woman. Who ruined themselves on clothes in the eighteenth century? I answer, men. That is why this horrible modern uniform was invented," he continued mournfully, looking down at his lounge suit. "Men were too vain. They spent all their money on dress. Now women do it for them. It is bad form to dress. You can kill anything by making it bad form. I believe you could kill love."

"Lady Cynthia regarded him with interest. "You couldn't kill anything that people really cared for," she said emphatically.

"Oh, couldn't you?" said Bannatyne lightly. "Besides, people don't really care for things. They've no tastes—only fashions; at least women haven't."

"You're rather hard on women," protested Lady Cynthia.

"I'm only honest, Lady Cynthia," he replied sadly. "I cannot pay compliments; it goes against my ingrained truthfulness. I must testify to what I know. If I had been George Regent in the fullness of his authority I would have revolutionized the sex. All women would have set their watches by me, and I would have killed love for a generation."

"Do you really feel so strongly as that?" asked she in wonder.

"It would have been interesting," he said dreamily—

“a world without love, killed by fashion. Can't you picture what would take place? ‘Yes, my dear,’ says Lady Smith to Miss Brown; ‘Yes, my dear; I have seen the Robinsons since their marriage. Do you know what she did? It is too terrible! Why, she had the vulgarity to fall in love with him. Of course we must cut her. Such a solecism is unpardonable. Ugh! how the very word makes one shudder!’ Let's talk of something pleasanter. How's your main?”

“Main!” said Lady Cynthia, checking her smile in wonder.

“Yes, a cockfighting main, you know. For fashion and good form, having deserted love, would move on to something else—say cockfighting, or it might be the prize ring, or gladiatorial shows, or sewerage systems.”

Lady Cynthia had resumed her laugh. “I wonder if you really believe anything, Mr. Bannatyne,” she said. “Mr. Bouverie was saying that you ought to go into the House of Commons.”

“Do they believe anything there?” he inquired.

“Because then,” she continued, ignoring his interruption, “you would have to know some one else's mind, if you didn't know your own.”

She had colored ever so delicately in saying this, and Bannatyne noticed it. He stopped abruptly.

“Did Bouverie say that of me?” he asked.

“Yes.” Lady Cynthia's voice weakened.

“Do you believe it, Lady Cynthia?” he asked pleadingly.

“I don't quite know what you mean,” she faltered.

"It isn't—well, I don't know what there is to believe in it. I think it might be nice to go into the House."

"That isn't at all what I mean," he said moodily, "and it isn't at all what Bouverie meant. He meant that I didn't know my own mind, and you know it very well, Lady Cynthia, but you're too kind-hearted to say so. And, what is more, I believe you agree with him—the beast. I mean Bouverie, of course."

"I don't—indeed I don't. I've not thought about the matter," said Lady Cynthia, who had regained her self-possession. She looked about her indifferently, as if the subject were already forgotten. They were by now in the park, and moving toward the house.

"I will take it out of Bouverie in a choice way," said he. "In the meantime, let me invite your attention to that meadow across the stream; how wonderfully it composes."

Lady Cynthia followed his gaze, and her eyes rested on a field scattered with dun cows, bright with the gold of the ragwort, and brown with summer grass. The duns and yellows made a harmony with the greens beyond, and she recognized the justice of her companion's taste.

"It is an adorable summer," said he.

"It is perfect," she said. His eyes saluted her, but she did not see; she was looking at the meadow.

"Everything works together for righteousness," said Bannatyne, "in the best of all possible worlds."

They walked on, and parted in the precincts of the garden, the girl with unfluttered pulse, but the man with

the tide of his blood a little faster and more urgent. He loved beauty, and here was also goodness. At least he conjectured so.

After making his preparations for lunch, he found that his courage had returned, and his thoughts recurred to the scene of his nocturnal adventure. He made his way to the eastern wing, and passed along the corridor from which the rooms opened. It was probable that the Dryad, who he was confident now had in her desperation taken refuge in Miss Ashcroft's room, had her nocturnal quarters close by. Therefore he had marked the room in order to make inquiries from that center. Arrived in the corridor, therefore, he began to examine the doors. He had marked the door with a D, but now, to his astonishment, every door that he passed was lettered unostentatiously with a D. He had been forestalled again, and the same ingenious hand that had snatched the shoe from him, had also played this Arabian Night's trick upon him. His admiration grew apace, and he had all the greater desire to meet the lady face to face. He told himself the game was far more interesting than Lady Coombe's pastoral play, though that was entertaining enough; but did not this marking of the door prove that his suspicions were right, and that the thief did reside in that neighborhood? It would be comparatively easy to find out who occupied the bedrooms in the corridors, but he did not know if he wanted to do it that way. Besides, out of twenty people he might find it difficult to pick the right one. All that would be accomplished by that information would be to narrow the field of inquiry. Wasn't that

what he wanted? He did not know. He wanted to do it all himself. If he had to discover where everyone slept, he——

In the midst of his ruminations a door opened near him, and Miss Ashcroft stepped into the corridor. She eyed him calmly.

“A delightful day, isn’t it?”

“Perfect,” he stammered.

“We get the sun in the morning here more than you do in the other wing,” said Miss Ashcroft graciously. “It strikes quite hotly through the windows. That is the only objection I have to my room. If you would like to see it, I can easily——”

“Thank you, no,” he interrupted hastily, “I—I will take your word for it.”

“In the afternoon, of course, we have the advantage,” pursued the lady in her equable and decided voice. “The rooms in the west become unbearable when ours grow cool. I find it delightful in the afternoon when I lie down, as I usually do, from three to four. If you would like to come in then, instead of now——”

“Indeed, no, thank you,” he burst in with a bow. “Besides, I’m not really inquisitive.”

Miss Ashcroft looked at him. “The only time I couldn’t show you my room is at night,” she said. “Any other time I don’t mind. Usually I’m not at home from 10 P.M. to 8 A.M.”

“It’s very good of you,” he said awkwardly.

Miss Ashcroft took out her watch and looked at it. “Of course, I can’t answer for my neighbors,” she said.

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"I'm only speaking for myself. After half past one. Don't you think it's time we went to luncheon?"

"If I may have the honor of accompanying you," said Bannatyne briskly.

Miss Ashcroft looked at his coat. "Where's your rose?" said she sharply.

"It's having whisky and water for the purposes of preservation," he said, taken aback.

Miss Ashcroft's mouth relaxed in a smile.

"Yes, it is useful sometimes. Come; there's the gong!"

CHAPTER IX

HERMIA

"My own idea," remarked Peter Bouverie at lunch, "my own idea about Miss Ashcroft's somnambulist is, that it was of her own sex, not ours."

A chorus of gratified assent arose from the men. "That's an inspiration," said Bannatyne. "I wonder we never thought of it before."

"You did not think of it at all," said Bouverie. "Alone I did it, but I am willing to make a free present of it for general use. The grounds on which I base my theory are slight, but sufficient; the evidence is chiefly circumstantial. In the first place, Miss Ashcroft's previous character is not consistent with her refusal to disclose the identity of an offender. Miss Ashcroft, if I may be allowed to say so, is characterized by a certain judicial ruthlessness which is highly commendable and wholly to her credit. Why should she refrain from holding the transgressor up to obloquy? That brings me to my second point. The only reason for secrecy would lie in the sex of the offender. Miss Ashcroft would naturally be disposed to spare one of her sex where she would be merciless to us. There are many minor arguments which I might lay before you, but these suffice."

"It seems sound," said Sir Edward Coombe.

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"Can we not all look round upon each other's faces and lay our hands on our hearts and say our consciences are clear?" pursued Bouverie, glancing about the table.

"You forget that you would not know you had been walking in your sleep," said Miss Ashcroft.

"Good heavens! do you mean to suggest that it may be any of us, then," asked Bouverie in alarm—"even me? I absolutely repudiate the reflection. I distinctly heard some one fall over my boots."

"What sort of fall was it," asked Hancock—"man, or woman?"

"Falls are not sexual," said Bouverie with dignity; "and, moreover, a cat could make more noise than a human being."

"I believe it *was* a cat," said Captain Madgwick.

Bannatyne got up from the table. "As a matter of fact," he said impressively, "we all really know who it was, only we won't say. It's too delicate a matter."

"You think—" began Bouverie.

Bannatyne shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows. "'There is a decency to be observed, quoth she.' The only person to whom I could have confided my suspicions knows, so I'll hold my tongue."

"That's not a bad idea," said Bouverie. "Let's all hold our tongues."

"Well, it certainly wasn't me," said Mrs. Everard Battye.

"Nor me," declared Miss Arden.

"I don't think it was me," said Lady Merrington thoughtfully.

Other feminine voices disclaimed identity with the nocturnal visitor, including Miss Chloe. Catching her voice, Bannatyne paused by her near the window.

"You don't know, Miss Chloe," he said. "You're only talking wildly." He looked at her earnestly. "But it's better not to say anything about it. It is better forgotten. I wonder Bouverie brought it up."

Chloe's face had been brightly expectant when she saw him, but now dulled, and took on a look of bewilderment.

"Do you really know, then, who it was?" she asked.

He dropped his eyes. "People have no right to pretend they know they didn't," he said earnestly, "because they don't. Could you say you didn't snore, Miss Chloe?" he asked abruptly, so abruptly that the color crowded into the girl's face.

"Ye— N— I don't know," she stammered. "But I'm sure I don't," she added.

"Miss Chloe," said Bannatyne solemnly, "how could you possibly be awake to know that you didn't snore last night? And how, in the same way, could you—anyone, of course, I mean—be awake to know you didn't walk in your sleep last night?" He paused, as if to let his words sink in, and Miss Chloe fell into confusion.

She blushed; she began to speak tremulously. "Do you mean—do you think it was I—" She paused.

"Don't think about it," he said solicitously.

"But I've never walked in my sleep in my life," protested poor Chloe indignantly. "I believe you've only—You didn't see me," she almost implored him.

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"No; unfortunately—I mean happily, I did not see you with my eyes, nor did I see anyone. I only heard—But it's no use continuing this painful conversation, Miss Chloe. Your secret is safe with me."

He nodded, and his smile behind the veil betrayed him. "Oh, Mr. Bannatyne," she cried in protest, with a laugh betwixt delight and relief, "you are dreadful! I really was afraid it was me, for a moment."

"You don't know it wasn't," he told her. "When shall we galumph again?"

Chloe's lips were parted in excitement. She laughed. The question did not seem to call for an answer. It was only part of Bannatyne's personality which had enchanted her. He breathed romance so charmingly.

"Remember," said Hancock's solemn voice in his ears, "rehearsal called for nine o'clock, in *Titania's* glade. Bannatyne, if you don't turn up I'll throw up the sponge."

"I shall be there—never fear," said Bannatyne; and to Chloe, "We'll galumph in the glade."

"Oh, but we can't," she said. "It was different last night."

"Well, it will be different to-night," he declared.

"Don't you think it's very absurd having these rehearsals at night?" asked Miss Arden as she came up.

Hancock smoothed his fat red face. "Ridiculous nonsense," he said emphatically. "Half the people are away flirting when you want 'em. Practically doubles one's work. Moonlight always makes people mad."

"I think it's positively the most charming idea I can remember in my long life," declared Bannatyne.

"You would," said Hancock rudely. "You're made that way. Miss Arden and I are not sentimental."

"Aren't you?" said Bannatyne anxiously to Miss Arden.

She shook her head, smiling. "Not a bit."

"At any rate, you suit the moonlight," he retorted. "You can't get out of that."

"How do you mean?" she asked, still smiling.

"Hearts beat wildly under the moon; lovers go mad; she draws hearts as she draws the sea. And so doth *Helena*. Those eyes are loadstones."

Miss Arden shook her head; her cheeks, faint, flushed. "That is said of *Hermia*," she declared. "You must look to *Hermia* for that comparison."

She was at that moment carried off by Lady Coombe, and Bannatyne followed Hancock out of doors. An afternoon cigar in the shady gardens was delightful, and idle communion with his own vagrant fancies was equally to his taste. He tried to count the goldfish in the fountain, without really hoping or wishing to succeed, and naturally failed. Then he wandered into the formal garden where the white peacocks stalked sedately, and passed out of that again into the park. The sun had grown in power, and something invited him toward the stream which, at one point in its progress through the park, broadened into a small lake. On the flat land on one side of it cows grazed; beyond, a wooded height rose bluffly and threw deep shadows on the quiet water; a gentle breeze flowed up the valley and ruffled the branches overhead. The water had a look of coolness that was refresh-

ing to the mind, and had almost a physical effect. He was strolling among the trees down toward it, when he perceived two girls seated on a log below him. He recognized one of them at once, for he had parted from her in the morning, and her costume was fresh in his mind. Then he recognized the other, as that daughter of Sylvia Latham, to whom Lady Fallowfield had presented him.

"Fairies," he said; "fairies in converse and an appropriate setting."

The sticks crackled under his feet, and the log was hidden by a clump of bushes. When he had passed this, he saw Miss Kitty Latham walking away toward the house, but Lady Cynthia was still seated. She looked up at his approach, but said nothing.

"We have had the same instinct," said he, sitting down beside her. "The water draws us."

"I'm not sure that it shouldn't be running water," she remarked. "The babbling of a brook is cooler, don't you think?"

"You're probably right," he assented, "and if we only move round the point beyond the boathouse we shall have the benefit of both."

Lady Cynthia hesitated; then she followed his example, and rose. Together they wended their way along the margin of the little lake to where the stream emerged from it in a tiny cataract of foaming water. Here they established themselves on the grass, Bannatyne with the air of one who has taken up a permanent situation, but Lady Cynthia gingerly, and with the appearance of one temporarily resting and armed for flight at any moment.

"That was a good idea of yours," he observed.

"It was your idea," said she, smiling.

"Was it? Well, it was a combined idea. We collaborated in it. Collaboration is the source of all brilliant notions. It stands to reason two heads are better than one; and two hearts also, for that matter."

"You mean two imaginations?" asked Lady Cynthia.

"That, too—two everything. The marriage of true minds is the only salvation of the world. By isolation we fall; in union we live. That is the explanation of matrimony, of course. Don't you know the ultimate law of the universe, Lady Cynthia? We've been trying to get the Greatest Common Measure of things for centuries. We haven't got it yet, but we've got near to it. The highest law of evolution is *flow*. That stream flows, you flow, and I flow. We answer to a rhythm; and so flows the eternal stream of unending lovers from the beginnings of a myriad eons ago. Union is strength, and flow is life."

He was gazing meditatively into the water, and Lady Cynthia watched him. She could not understand all that he said, but it interested her. It had the effect of opening up new thoughts in her mind. What was this flow which seemed to express the riddle of the universe? She wanted to ask some questions, but when he spoke it was on quite another topic.

"Who is Miss Ashcroft?"

Lady Cynthia wished that he were not quite so volatile, but she answered:

"She has rather a big place in Gloucestershire, and

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goes in for gardening. She has some twenty gardeners under her own supervision, I believe."

"What a pity she isn't in the cast!" said Bannatyne, still looking into the water. "She would have made a capital *Puck*."

"*Puck*!" she echoed, with a puzzled smile.

"Yes, *Puck*. I'm sure she's capable of doing more mischief than all the rest of us put together. *Puck* would be a—well, a duffer to her. She ought to play *Puck*. By the way, have we got a *Puck* yet?"

Lady Cynthia did not think so. Bannatyne shook his head. "It seems to me that Hancock is muffing this show," he observed. "No *Bottom*, no *Puck*. Oh, by the way, we *have* a *Bottom*; I had forgotten."

"The cobbler, you said," said Lady Cynthia.

He nodded. "A rare spirit, a genuine Shakespearean hind. I thought all cobblers were gloomy atheists. This one seems to be a jovial optimist. But we ought to have a *Puck*. Lady Merrington thinks that the character might be played in short skirts and a wand. What do you say?"

He eyed her interrogatively.

"I—I don't quite see how it could be done," said Lady Cynthia doubtfully. "*Puck*, you see, isn't—*Puck* is a man."

"No, a spirit," said he; "by no means the same thing, believe me."

"Well, at any rate, it isn't a girl," said Lady Cynthia emphatically.

He took off his hat to let the air play about his head.

"No, perhaps not," he said. "But still it might be managed if only some one would be willing," he added, looking at her.

Lady Cynthia ignored this. "Do you know your part?" she asked.

"Will you hear me?" he asked.

She shook her head, smiling. "Oh, dear, no!" said she.

"I wonder if some one would—Miss Ashcroft, for example?" he said.

"It is quite possible," said Lady Cynthia indifferently.

"But it is possible she wouldn't," he said. "Women are so selfish."

Lady Cynthia raised her eyebrows lightly. "Are they?" she inquired.

"When I say that, I do not, of course, include all women," he hastened to explain. "All generalizations include and presuppose a minority report, Lady Cynthia, not excepting that chief generalization, the House of Commons."

"I don't think I quite understand that," remarked Lady Cynthia.

"I don't either," he said cheerfully.

Lady Cynthia's teeth of pearl appeared on the rim of her red lip, as if she struggled with a smile. She averted her head. Mr. Bannatyne was quite absurd, but his company was enlivening. She was contented to sit there with the murmur of the fall in her ears, fanned by the cool air, and to listen to his nonsense. Bannatyne also found it very pleasant, stretched at length upon the grassy

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bank, to divide his glances between his companion and the scenery. A fish leaped in the pool and caught his eye, which then strayed back to Lady Cynthia. She sat with her skirts tucked backward, supporting herself on one shapely arm. A plain amethystine brooch gathered the folds of her dress at the bosom. She had the air of maidenly aloofness, of a serene virginity, of a prettiness undisturbed by any distressing problems or fears, of a grace rather pure than rich, of a single-mindedness and sincerity. But who could tell what that untroubled breast was capable of? The surface of the waters was as quiet as the pool they lay by, but when the waters should be troubled—? No maiden can have any real knowledge of life, or even of herself. But perhaps, like all generalizations, this presupposes a minority report.

Bannatyne, admiring more deeply now that he had realized her beauty, was gazing at her profile when his attention was caught by something on the wooded height behind. Something white was moving among the undergrowth, and he followed its course. It wavered, came to a halt, proceeded again; it was mounting slowly. Presently it emerged into an open space and fronted toward the stream. The distance was not great, and he thought he recognized the figure now. It was Miss Grant-Summers.

Bannatyne was convinced that she was looking down on them, and he was almost induced to wave a signal to her, a friendly signal to disperse suspicions. If two people met and lingered by a woodland lake it was not neces-

sarily under the rose. But the question which his mind suddenly was concerned with was why he desired to demonstrate to Miss Grant-Summers that they were not covertly there. He could not say. Was it because of Miss Grant-Summers, or because of Lady Cynthia? This was too subtle for him, and he discarded the train of thought. Women had always stood for much in his life. He had an extravagant vein of sentiment, which was, however, preserved from sentimentalism by his sense of humor. As he looked, he recalled his second rout by Miss Ashcroft just before lunch, and recalled also that he had not minded it very much. But he was no farther than he had been the night before. It was time he did something to elucidate the mystery, if he was ever going to elucidate it. Women are all humbugs, he thought, gazing. The odds were that the Dryad was one of those he had encountered. No one had turned a hair, so to speak, yet *one* must be the Dryad. In the circumstances he had no option save to conduct a rigid inquiry, and he must make a beginning.

He raised himself quickly. After all, it was natural to begin with *Hermia*, for *Hermia* was his. And there stood Miss Grant-Summers waiting. He got to his feet.

"Dear me, I must learn my part," said he apologetically. "I must get some one to hear me, since you won't, Lady Cynthia."

The girl did not offer to rise. She smiled at him amiably, and nodded. "Mr. Hancock will be dreadful if you don't know it," she warned him.

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"That's terrorizing me. I must take steps at once," he declared, and raised his hat. He really wavered. He was quite happy where he was, but he had his duty to perform. It would not wait one moment longer. He moved off round the margin of the lake, and struck up the hill. It was not until ten minutes later that Lady Cynthia moved. Then she got up, shook her skirts, and set her hat anew; after which she cast an eye upward toward the wood. Two figures were boldly in view, a man's and a woman's, through the interstices of the screening foliage. She made out both, and it was obvious that the man, at a lower level, was endeavoring to overtake the woman. Lady Cynthia turned her calm eyes on them for a minute or two, and then her lips assumed a little curve of disdain.

"So that's learning his part," she said, as she left the spot on the road to the Hall.

Bannatyne had gone swiftly upward by the rough track, and he caught up with Miss Grant-Summers toward the top, where a seat stood under rhododendrons, and there was a vista in the pines, undergrown with bracken. Her eyes were bright beyond usual, and her demeanor was that of one in a pleasurable tension. She parted her full lips in a smile as he approached.

"I thought it was you," she said lightly.

There was, Bannatyne felt, a delicate assumption in both her words and her tone that he had come because he had seen her, because she had challenged him. She was as radiant to-day in the fullness of the afternoon as she had been at the supper table, as rich and full-flowered.

Her dress was by no means plain, and it seemed in keeping with her luscious beauty.

"I didn't quite make out who else was there," she said tentatively.

Bannatyne looked at her with his shy smile. "Lady Cynthia refused to hear my part. Won't you, please?"

"Don't you think I shall hear enough of it this evening?" she asked lightly.

"*Hermia* might be kind to her *Lysander*," he said playfully.

"I think he required keeping in order a good deal," remarked Miss Grant-Summers. "His behavior was not all that fancy might have painted."

Bannatyne concluded in his mind that Miss Grant-Summers allowed herself a full liberty; she did not shrink from the broad red blood of life. Well, so much the better. Moreover, it promised sport for his search. She could smile and smile, and be a hypocrite, he was certain. A belief began to grow in him that she was the heroine of his adventure.

"One good turn deserves another," he remarked. "We will hear each other. Surely the occasion is appropriate. Let us rehearse as we go along."

Miss Grant-Summers looked doubtful. "If we sat here we might do it," she said.

"Please, let us walk," he pleaded. "I want to mount to the top and see the world and the goodness thereof. You can see over the shoulder of the downs to the weald from the ring of pines above."

Still she hesitated, and then leaned gracefully on

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her sunshade. "The fact is, I'm awaiting some one," she explained, looking brilliant. "I'm not sure it's not three people."

"What an assignation!" he declared, knowing that this would be permitted to him.

"Surely the numbers whitewash it," she retorted. "I believe Captain Madgwick, Mr. Gay, and Mr. Ather-ton are on their way to the Hall for something of mine. It was very ridiculous of them, but they took it into their heads. I left a handkerchief behind, and I suppose they wanted to discover who—was fleetest."

She sat down, as she spoke, on the broad seat, and thus invited him to join her.

"And the reward?" he asked, not joining her.

"Oh, there was no award mentioned," said Miss Grant-Summers lightly. "Virtue is to be its own reward."

"There must be some reward," he insisted.

"The handkerchief," she suggested airily.

"Suppose they have a dead heat?"

"It might be divided," said she.

"No." Bannatyne approached the seat. "You have put yourself in rather a quandary," he said. "The best thing you can do is to run away from it. Come with me."

"What *do* you mean?" she asked, laughing appreciatively.

"Don't you know the story of the girl with five lovers, four of whom jumped into the sea to save her; and so she promptly married the dry one?"

Miss Grant-Summers laughed louder. "Are you the dry one?" she asked.

"Yes," said Bannatyne, shyly audacious. "Won't you—" He left his invitation unended; but it was impossible not to associate it with his anecdote. Miss Grant-Summers flushed deeply, and she was not given to flush. His delicate masterfulness took hold of her.

"You make me as conscienceless as yourself," she declared, as she rose with deliberate grace.

They mounted slowly along the winding path, and the seat was soon lost in a turn among the spreading bushes.

"'Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood,'" said Bannatyne, so suddenly, and with such circumstantiality of address, that Miss Grant-Summers started. Instantly she colored, and the next moment sex was at the summit of triumph in her. It stood armed to the glove tips with capacity and combativeness. The feminine breathed from her very aspect. Her eyes were unduly bright.

"Do you really wish to?" she asked, smiling; "or were you merely repeating casually?"

"The situation caught my thoughts," he said. "Please let us go on."

"'Be it so, Lysander; find you out a bed;
For I upon this bank will rest my head.'"

As she spoke Bannatyne stopped. "Ought we to enact the scene as well?" he asked slyly. "There is a bank."

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Miss Grant-Summers glanced at the brackened slope, and then at him.

"I don't think it's quite demanded by circumstances," she responded. "But I make no objection to your doing so."

"That would be half-hearted," he objected.

"One turf shall serve as pillow for us both;
One heart, one bed, two bosoms, and one troth."

"I think," said Miss Grant-Summers quickly, "that Mr. Hancock has cut a good deal just there."

"Oh!" he looked his dismay. "And I'd learned it all up so carefully. Well—

'Here is my bed; sleep give thee all thy rest!'

"With half that wish the wisher's eyes be press'd!"
declaimed *Hermia*.

"Stage directions, 'they sleep,'" said Bannatyne. "I suppose you don't want to sleep. It is hot, though. Let's get farther away from Madgwick and his rivals. I don't feel safe here."

Miss Grant-Summers laughed, as if she had nothing on her conscience. She was, in fact, royally indifferent.

"You'd better begin your abuse of me," she said, with significant eyes. There was no mistaking their meaning. They challenged him on the word "abuse."

He responded dutifully: "I cannot. I cannot. I absolutely refuse to.

'Hang off, thou cat, thou burr!'

The man was mad."

Hermia

“Oh, that, of course, was the drug,” she said lightly.

“‘Out, loathed medicine! O hated potion, hence!’

I’ll get Hancock to cut that, too,” said Bannatyne.

“But the point will be gone, Mr. Bannatyne,” she protested, handsomely smiling. “I might as well object to the terms in which I have to address *Helena*:

“‘Oh, me! you juggler! you canker-blossom!’”

“*O Helena!* that’s quite another matter,” said he.

“I think I’m rather cattish in my address,” said she.
“*Hermia* certainly lacked manners.

‘How low am I, thou painted maypole? speak;
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.’

I am low distinctly.” Miss Grant-Summers made a pretty pause here, and then went on: “But I have my doubts if I am sufficiently low in the other sense to play my part adequately,

‘Because I am so dwarfish, and so low?’

You wouldn’t say I was exactly dwarfish, would you, Mr. Bannatyne?”

Again he was challenged by her eyes. He shook his head. “Good heavens; no. But that is of no consequence. Hamlet, who was fat, and scant of breath, invariably appears on the stage as meager as a rake and talks nineteen to the dozen. And *Hermia*”—he looked at her carefully with a measuring eye—“*Hermia* must

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be five feet six, when she should be dwarfish—say five feet or under.”

“Five-five, as it actually happens,” said Miss Grant-Summers with a laugh. “At least, I don’t answer to *Lysander’s* contemptuous description of me:

“‘Get you gone, you dwarf;
You minimus, of hind’ring knot-grass made;
You bead, you acorn!’”

“And I’ve got to say all that,” said Bannatyne sadly. “I wish Hancock would cut all that, and leave the other in.”

“You are quite incorrigible,” she laughed at him.

But Bannatyne was standing with his hat off, his face to the west, where on the ramparts of the distant hills arose the parks and towers of a great school. Below, Temple Hall lay enmeshed in the luxuriant summer leafage, its red worn front taking the high sun. Bannatyne remembered Madgwick and his mission, and he also suddenly remembered something else. His quick mind swung round into the new channel.

“Five-five,” he repeated aloud. “Does that mean fives for gloves and fives for boots?”

“I really don’t know what number I take in gloves or boots,” said she. “One doesn’t buy that way.”

“Oh!” said he, “don’t you? Well, now I come to think of it, I don’t either. But some people do.”

“Oh, I suppose there are some people who do,” said Miss Grant-Summers indifferently.

Her indifference might be part of the splendid men-

dacity of which women are capable, and Bannatyne was baffled. Yet she probably would not buy shoes which were numbered. The vision of the village maiden rose again before him threateningly. But a village maiden could not have stolen his shoe. It was puzzling. He thought he saw a deep gulf yawning between himself and this beautiful woman. She was not his princess.

Miss Grant-Summers had sat down on the pine knoll contentedly, but Bannatyne's bosom was full of unrest.

"Hark!" he said, as sounds came up the wood. "Here are the hounds. We must take cover."

"I'm going to stay here," said *Hermia* invitingly.

"I can't possibly," he told her. "I cannot stay and witness the triumph of Madgwick."

"Perhaps he won't win the race," she suggested.

"If you'd only given *me* a chance," he said reproachfully.

"I had nothing to do with it," said she. "I have nothing to do with it. Some one is good enough to bring me a handkerchief. That's all."

"Yes, that's all; but it's symbolic. We are ruled by symbolism. We die for it. A flag is a symbol, but it is also an ideal, and blood has flowed, since the world began, about a flag. So two hearts have ached and broken, since the world began, about a handkerchief."

"Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love," she quoted.

"The devil can quote Scripture," he retorted.

"Thank you," said she.

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"And angels cynicism," he continued. "I feel most uneasy sitting here. If they find me, they'll— What do you think they'll do to me?"

She laughed. "I really can't say."

"Of course, they ought to offer me their congratulations as victor, but they won't."

The noise of some one hurrying was nearer now, and Bannatyne rose. "I can't face them," he said. "I am constitutionally a coward. Besides, how can I witness some one else's triumph? Won't you come?"

She shook her head. "I want my handkerchief."

"I wish you'd give me something to do," he said regretfully, walking away. "I would have willingly fetched you anything—a handkerchief, a hat, or number five shoes."

"I don't wear fives," called out Miss Grant-Summers to his retreating figure. "I don't know anything about numbers."

He disappeared into the underwood.

CHAPTER X

SYLVIA LATHAM'S DAUGHTER

BANNATYNE went down the hill "thorough bush, thorough brier," and did not encounter any of the competitors. He fled not so much from them as from Miss Grant-Summers. She was not his princess, he decided, and, on the whole, he thought he was glad she was not. His next step must be to experiment with *Helena*, and meanwhile he determined to interview Miss Ashcroft again, even at the risk of a third rout. He had begun not to dislike these exchanges with her, and mentally he did homage to her wonderful capacity.

He wandered into the gardens, through the orchard and the rosery, where his thoughts centered more concretely on Miss Ashcroft. He found the Gloire Lyonnaise bush, and stood before it in a profound meditation for some minutes. Would it render up its secret? This pursuit of his was born at the outset of a whimsical idea, but in proportion to his defeat his interest rose. He had been baffled so oddly that he had begun to take the hunt quite seriously. It not only whiled away some pleasant idle hours, but it assumed the attractiveness of a piece of detective work. It was as engrossing by now as a problem in chess or a game of bridge. Indeed, it was more engrossing, inasmuch as there were human elements in

it which loomed romantically in his airy fancy. The place was full of fair women, and one of these was to be ruthlessly tracked down and identified. Would the rose help?

He plucked a bloom in the bud and set it in his coat. He liked to look upon it in the light of a gage of battle. While he wore *La Gloire Lyonnaise*, the enemy should be advised of his intention to fight to the bitter end. That rose was his emblem of constancy. He pursued his path with light footsteps out upon the southern lawns which sloped gently to the brimming stream. A bridge gave access to the continuing lawns beyond, till finally the vision of the eye was closed in by shrubberies and the wooded heights beyond, from which he had just descended. The water bubbled musically between the banks of greensward, a clear, cool rivulet, unbroken by weed and free of wild flowers on the marge, in its passage through the pleasaunce. Trout hung in the depths, or flashed against the current on an alarm. Bannatyne crossed the bridge and walked by the borders beyond, bright now with "bedding" plants, and fragrant with sweet peas. Masses of clematis of various hues rolled round the wooden bowers and pillars which diversified the gravel pathway.

As he walked in his leisurely way, drinking in with delight the sights and sounds about him, he was aware of a humming in the air, as of the low droning of bagpipes. Indifferently he looked up, but the sound seemed remote, arising from a great distance, as it might be the far-off roar of a great city dwindled to a murmur. He

proceeded a dozen paces, when the sound seemed to have increased in volume, and as he stood listening, it swelled audibly with each moment of time. By this time he was alive with interest and curiosity, and his gaze wandered inquisitively in the air for some sign which would reveal the source of this strange sound. Presently the air above him appeared to be thick with flies, streaming restlessly to and fro, yet bent on a definite mission. Then he understood. The bees were swarming.

No one particularly wants a swarm in July, but the bees do not take human wishes into account. Where the queen goes, they follow; and her majesty was winging her way now above Bannatyne's head on some unknown adventure, impelled by some mysterious instinct, and with no knowledge of her destination. With equal ignorance, and moved by equally as blind an instinct, the swarm pursued her.

The buzzing was loud in heaven for a few minutes, and then the living cloud trailed away over the border. Bannatyne resumed his walk; but he had gone little more than a dozen paces when he was arrested by a cry. He stopped, for that cry had gone straight to the center of his nerves; it spelled fear; it betokened horror. There was in it a nameless tragic note that thrilled him. As he waited, it was repeated, and had now risen to a scream, and a scream is terrifying always in its very thinness. It came from across the lawn. Bannatyne rushed in that direction. He leaped over a flower bed, pushed through the shrubbery, and emerged on the path at a point where the stream curved, and where on the

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smooth grass, to face the undulating water, a summer house had been built, embowered in flowering bushes. As he reached it a human note again struck on his ears, not a cry this time, but a gasp, which was almost more disquieting. In his preoccupation with this phenomenon, he did not notice the presence of discomfited bees circling blunderingly in the air.

At the door of the summer house, however, the situation burst upon him. Miss Latham, white of face in her white muslin gown, was on the seat, her slim young body thrown back into one corner, and her starting eyes fixed with an expression of horror, of panic, on a black mass that moved and crumbled and changed and remade itself, upon the skirt of her dress that rested on the seat. The summer house was thick with bees—bees hurrying to the swarm, bees in search of it, disconsolate, angry bees, bees blundering and vicious of aspect.

"Keep still, keep still," said Bannatyne in a voice which would have been quiet if he could have made it. "Keep still; I am here."

He went up to her, and took her hand. "Don't move, child; don't move. All will go well if you trust to me. Are you listening?"

Her lips parted, and he seemed to hear a faint "Yes." He pressed her hand, which was as cold as the hand of the dead. "Can you stay where you are?" he asked. "Is the position hurting you?"

"No," issued faintly from the girl's lips.

"Very well. Now I will sit down beside you, and show you how little need there is for your alarm," he

went on in his delightful voice. He sat down, and put an arm about her to support her, lest she should slip despite her negative, and, falling, scatter the deadly swarm beside her. The warm pressure of his arm seemed to give the girl relief, or respite rather, from her fears.

“Can you send them away?” she gasped.

“Very easily,” he said, holding her closer. “You see, it’s all the queen. She blunders away somewhere, and the horde have only just got sense enough to follow. They know no more. The queen chooses some suitable place to begin the new life in, and they blindly rally to her. She has made a mistake this time; and she shall know it. Find the queen, remove her, and they will all follow,” he ended cheerily.

“Can you find her?” asked Miss Latham anxiously; but she was not so deathly white as she had been.

“Why, of course,” he declared. “She’s in that mass, but she’s easily detected because she’s so big. And if you will just sit here quietly, as you’re doing, a little while, I will soon bring a gardener and——”

“Oh, please, no—no; don’t leave me!” she pleaded almost in tears, and clung to him. Panic had seized upon her once more. She was, it seemed, on the edge of hysteria.

Bannatyne quickly considered. He knew little or nothing about bees, and he certainly did not know how to find the queen. If he made the attempt, it was possible that he might disturb and enrage the swarm, with terrible results to both of them. Bees, he remembered, had been

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known to cause death; and, looking on that scared face and little head, and that young pulsing body he held in his arms, he could not but be frightened at the prospect before him in case of failure. Shock would easily destroy that delicate life within. His heart sank.

"I should only be three minutes at the most," he said in a reassuring voice. "There's certain to be a gardener about. And we've been here more than three minutes, and nothing has happened. The bees won't touch you. They've only one idea—which is, to keep close to the queen. Such is their loyalty."

He felt her grasp tighten. "No; I dare not," she breathed. "I should die—I should die!"

Bannatyne said nothing, but let his glance go over her face, small as a child's and as wild-sweet. Her eyes were closed, as if to shut out a dreaded sight. She had surrendered herself to him; she had no voice in her own destiny; it was his affair. His gaze went down to the seat on which the skirt rested with its awful burden. The black mass, inert, but crumbling and moving, was within an inch or so of her body. It was the time for heroic measures. He slowly removed his arms, whispering:

"I'm not going to leave you. Be brave. I'm going to get rid of them another way."

She let him go reluctantly, and with a gasp in her throat.

"Be brave!" he urged; "I know you will, child." He was now on his feet. He quickly took a knife from his pocket and opened the big blade.

She was watching him. "What are you going to do?" she asked in that low voice which they had involuntarily assumed, as if to avoid alarming the bees.

"I'm going to cut off your skirt," said Bannatyne, with a reassuring smile. "It won't take long. Shut your eyes, and pretend you're in bed, child."

Miss Latham shut her eyes obediently, and he took hold of her dress. He must not excite the swarm, so that he was forced to begin with his knife well away from it. At the first cut and the rip that followed she gave a little shiver and a start; but after that she was still, her eyes remaining closed, her breath coming hard.

Bannatyne stripped the muslin to the hem, and then sawed through that with his knife; that done, he began on the other side, until he had completed his task. It took him a few minutes, and the angry bees that had not settled, whirled about his head. But now a piece of the skirt had been completely cut away, and, dropping his knife, he stooped again, put his arms gently round the motionless girl, and drew her softly and cautiously away. He lifted her, still with drawn eyes, and carried her tenderly out of the arbor and set her down on the quiet grass that looked on the placid, happy stream. As he did this she opened her eyes and breathed deeply.

"Oh!" she sighed, "you have saved—I'm falling—I can't see."

He caught her and held her to him, the white petticoat which the destruction of her dress had revealed swaying softly in the wind.

Miss Latham sighed again.

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"You will soon be better," he said encouragingly.

"How can I thank you?" she murmured. "It was terrible!" She shuddered.

"I'm afraid," said Bannatyne ruefully, "I've ruined your dress."

She cast a glance at her skirt, and color crept into her face.

"It's of no matter," she said weakly. "I'm only grateful to you."

"Tell me how it happened," he asked, to distract her mind. "We can sit under this apple tree and gaze in the stream. How softly it flows!—doesn't it? I wish life flowed like that, without alarms, without noise, without bees—placidly, pleasantly, to a happy murmur of music. There should always be running water in a landscape. Tell me how it happened."

"I hardly know," said the girl confusedly. "I didn't notice anything at first; I only heard a humming, and I didn't pay any attention, and then I found they were settling."

Bannatyne held up a finger at her. "Confess," said he playfully, "you were asleep—you were having an afternoon nap."

Miss Latham flushed, and smiled dimly. "Perhaps I was just a little sleepy," she admitted. "The sun . . . I was reading a book, and it wasn't very interesting."

"And now here's a crow to pluck with you," went on Bannatyne with levity. "You made off as soon as you saw me coming, just after lunch. Lady Cynthia had

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more generosity; she stayed. But you turned your back on me. Oh, Miss Latham, unkind, cruel, ruthless Miss Latham! And I was a friend of your mother's, too."

"You knew my mother?" she asked quickly, with a sudden display of almost breathless interest.

Bannatyne looked into the moving face of the water, where cool shadows checkered the sunshine.

"Yes," he said abstractedly, and his manner had undergone a revolution. He spoke even slowly. "I knew her fifteen years ago."

"She died when I was only seven," said the girl.

Bannatyne gazed at her, but she was now watching the water. He took her for twenty; she must have been a child of five when he knew Sylvia Latham, and had been in love with her wildly through one season. The passion of a boy of twenty is invariably devout and untouched of earth; and Sylvia Latham, a beautiful young woman of five-and-twenty, had encouraged his visits with good temper, been moved a little by his devotion, and laughingly set it aside. It was undeclared, but it was in the air. Latham himself had been amused by it. Bannatyne recalled now to memory features in that face in the grave which spoke to him again in the young kindling face before him. He sighed. How one sighs at the memories of twenty, a wild, a foolish, and an honest age! It seemed so strange to be sitting there with Sylvia Latham's daughter. The inconsequent strain in Bannatyne's mind moved him to quotation. He had done homage to the occasion and the memory. He murmured: "'By the waters of Babylon we sat down

and wept, when we remembered thee, O Zion.' Zion, Miss Kitty, is our past, our youth—'youth, the isle of voices,' that calls to us across melancholy seas." He sighed. "Well, we are by the waters of Babylon; can you not hear them babbling? If Bouverie had said that I should have punched him, and I hope you would have pinched him, Miss Kitty. But I love the voice of the waters. Will you ever weep when you remember your lost youth by the waters of Babylon? Ah, me! Your mother was but little older than you when I remember her, Kitty."

He was unaware that he had used her name so intimately, but it struck on her ears with a sound of alarm, and something else. It thrilled her, somehow. He had spoken almost abruptly, and he rose. "You had better get in and see to things, hadn't you?" he asked pleasantly, with a quick change of manner.

Kitty Latham flushed prettily. She was suddenly aware of herself and her wrecked dress. She scurried off with the noiseless speed of some denizen of the woods. Bannatyne looked after, the flash of white in his eye, as she disappeared through the bushes.

"Is it Kitty, by any chance?" he murmured, and then straightened himself. "She has the gait of a dryad, by Jove!" he said with interest.

As he went up to the house his thoughts were taken up much with the past. He could remember the shock with which he had heard of Mrs. Latham's death when he was on wild Pacific shores. It did not seem so very far away, now that he had summoned the ghosts from

the graves, and yet here was Sylvia Latham's daughter grown up.

“O Heart that never beats nor heaves
In that one darkness lying still. . . .”

Rossetti's lines sprang to his mind. It was terrible to think of that silence fallen on the beautiful woman thirteen long years since. The tears were in his eyes as he met Hancock on the terrace above the lawn.

“Lady Coombe's been awfully obstreperous,” said Hancock, mopping his forehead. “I don't know when I've had a harder fight.”

“What's the matter?” inquired Bannatyne, coming tardily back to earth.

“Oh, she's taken on because of Cooper—swore she wouldn't have him; said it would be ridiculous to have a *Bottom* from the village, and so on; asked me to remember *she* would have to play with him.”

“Well?” queried Bannatyne.

“Oh, I managed it. Declared that we were following Shakespeare's example; suggested it would form a valuable precedent for future casts; claimed it was art only that mattered, and that we must sacrifice personal prejudices for art; and offered formally to throw up my post as stage manager. That settled her. She was plaintive, but beaten.”

“And here, if I mistake not, comes bully *Bottom*,” said Bannatyne, looking along the terrace to a gate in the brick wall, at which a stout form was standing irresolute. Hancock waved an arm.

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"Come on, Cooper," he called encouragingly.

The grin on Cooper's face dawned on them in the distance. He approached with a shambling gait, with an air of diffident and respectful self-satisfaction.

"I don't know if I be late, sir," said he as he came up; "but the housekeeper she gave me a little bit tea, and sent me on here. I told her like as how I was acting for you gentlemen."

"Quite right—quite right," said Hancock. "Know your part?"

"Well, I can't say as how I got it right off, perfect like," said Cooper, "but sims I got the best part of it. I got my boy to hear me. He's a rare good hand with a book, and knows a lot, he doos."

"Capital! We'll have a hearing at once, Cooper. Bannatyne, would you mind asking Lady Coombe if she can give me five minutes? Her attendance is necessary." He looked grimly at Bannatyne, as who should say, "I'm going to press my advantage, and receive submission in due form."

Bannatyne went into the house, and Hancock led the cobbler into a small room furnished with piano, old pictures, tapestry, and Jacobean chairs. Cooper gazed about him with open satisfaction.

"I never been in this room before, sir," he confessed. "I've been in many others, like. Not that I make for her ladyship; but there's the housekeeper—I makes for she; and there's the butler—I makes for he. I makes for a terrible lot of them."

Hancock took out his prompt copy. "Well, let us

hear how you can do it, Cooper," he said. "I'll read the lines just preceding your part, and give you the cues."

Cooper also opened the book which had been left for him in the morning. He laughed appreciatively.

"This here *Bottom*, sir," he said, "sims as if he wanted to play all the blessed parts. It do, don't it? Wants to play *Ercles*, and *Pyramus*, and *Thisbe*, the lady, like, and a blessed roarin' lion, too."

Cooper guffawed heartily, and Hancock joined him.

"Now," he said when they had finished, "is all our company here?"

Cooper, in unconscious recollection of his schoolboy days, put his hands behind his back, and, standing to attention, began.

Bannatyne, meanwhile, was in search of Lady Coombe, but could not find her. He heard that she was in the garden, and pursued her thither, rambling fruitlessly through the labyrinths. At last he returned to discover that she was entertaining visitors from the countryside to tea. Consequently he abandoned his mission as impracticable, and was rejoining Hancock to tell him how matters stood, when he came upon a group of young men taking refreshments in one of the rooms. Cordials, spirits, and mineral waters of all kinds were spread upon the sideboard, and the siphons were singing as Bannatyne entered. He recognized Oliver Lock at once with his pale face and long light hair, and he recognized also Gay and Walrond. There were others whom he did not know. It occurred to him now that he was very thirsty after his adventures, and he went

to the sideboard for a glass. Walrond, who was by way of understudying the part of host, offered him the whisky and seltzer and ice in turn, and he was soon quaffing from his glass with the dissipated air of five-and-twenty.

"Don't you think, Mr. Bannatyne," said Gay, who had edged toward him, "that it's rather rot not fixing up a *Puck* yet?"

"Haven't they?" asked Bannatyne in surprise. "Good heavens! nor have they. I had forgotten. What can Hancock be about? Fortunately we have secured *Bottom*."

Young Gay looked as if he had something on his mind. He dropped his eyeglass several times. "We've just been talking it over," he said awkwardly, "and if it's any assistance, don't you know, I shouldn't mind playing *Puck*."

Bannatyne glanced at him, and the mental association of that Oxford voice, that huge collar, and that eyeglass with *Puck* was too much for him. He abruptly turned his back, as if to lift his whisky and soda.

"An excellent idea!" he got forth at last. "I'll suggest it to Hancock. But who'll play your present part?"

"Oh, there's not much playing in *Snout*," said Gay. "Atherton says he'll take that on."

"Hancock will be delighted," said Bannatyne, knowing that Hancock would be far from delighted, but was so desperate that he would probably consent to anything. "I am seeing him now, and will speak about it."

"Thanks awfully," said Gay in an offhand manner, as of one who had merely offered his services in the interests of humanity, and whose thanks, therefore, were merely conventional. "I should like the thing to be a success."

"You will go far to make it so," Bannatyne gravely answered him. "And now, who won?"

Gay stared at him in wonder. "Won?"

"Yes, who got the handkerchief, and what was his reward?"

Gay's mouth widened in a smile. "Ah, you mean Miss Grant-Summers," he said. "I wonder how you knew. Atherton won, as a matter of fact, but I ought to have won."

"Ethics," said Bannatyne, "are by no means identical with life. Lots of things *ought*, but aren't."

"I fell into a gorse bush," explained Gay in his clear, drawling voice. "You see, I'm rather short-sighted. It's a confounded nuisance. I didn't see the blessed thing, and it turned out to be several—a regular nest of gorse bushes. And I got infernally scratched, and Atherton got ahead and won."

"What did he get?" inquired Bannatyne with interest. He wondered how far Miss Grant-Summers's sense of romance would take her. She had enjoyed playing at being Queen of the Tourney.

"I believe she let him kiss her hand," said Gay, with the aloofness of dignity that takes no interest in the facts.

"Is that all?" exclaimed Bannatyne. "I thought

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she would have gone farther than that; that she would have extended her favors. She is of generous blood. Well, it becomes a queen to keep such gracious distance. But it's more like *Helena*."

"*Helena!*" Young Gay was staring at him again.

"I'll remember *Puck*, Gay," he said, and turned away.

He found Hancock superintending the recital of *Pyramus* and *Thisbe*, and Cooper still with his hands behind his back, glibly iterative.

"“Oh, kiss me through the hole of this vile wall!”"

"Sims to me, sir, if I may express my idea," remarked Cooper diffidently, "that this *Bottom* is a little bit cracked, like. And *Thisbe*, she's a fair cough drop."

He beamed on Hancock, who turned abruptly to Bannatyne, and murmured through his suppressed laughter:

"The part was made for him. My boy, this will be a roaring success."

Bannatyne contemplated the smiling cobbler. "Yes, if you can keep Lady Coombe all right," he agreed.

"We've just got to," said Hancock with determination.

"There's that song, sir," said Cooper, approaching them with the air of one who has important news. "If I can't get it up, like, I suppose some other will do as well.

“The ousel cock, so black of hue,
With orange tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill.”

'Tain't much sense in it, to my way of thinking—just a string o' birds' names—a corollary, like. Sims to me another song'd do just as well, if I couldn't manage the music—like this, sir:

“ ‘ ’Twas my delight of a zhoiny noight
Of the zeazon of the year.’ ”

Cooper put fine volume into his voice as he trolled forth the air, and Hancock stood nodding approval.

“Excellent!” he said. “But I think we will have the other all the same. People have an unreasonable prejudice in favor of the original text. I have no fears on the score of your incapacity. Now I’ve heard your voice I can sympathize with *Bottom’s* request to be cast for the lion too.”

Cooper grinned appreciatively.

“And above all, remember,” enjoined Bannatyne, “that you’re playing up to Lady Coombe. It is the well-known duty of all actors to play up to one another. They love doing it. You must feed ‘Lady Coombe.’ ”

“Feed her ladyship, sir?” inquired the bewildered cobbler.

“Yes—allow her to score, work up to her, surrender the stage, feed her part.”

“I won’t have my best rôle spoiled, Bannatyne,” said Hancock decidedly. “Shut up! I’m stage manager here. Go away to your women.”

“Very well,” said Bannatyne resignedly, moving for the door; “but I’ve done what I could. I’ve given the

best advice. Don't blame me if things go wrong. Oh, by the way, Hancock, I've got you a *Puck*."

Hancock turned attentive ears.

"Gay!" said Bannatyne.

"Gay!" echoed the other.

"Yes, eyeglass, Oxford manner, chubby face all complete. He's burning to do it. Some one called Atherton will take *Snout*."

Hancock threw up his shoulders. "Have it your own way," he said moodily. "Some one must play it, and I can't struggle against all of you. Only leave me *Bottom*. I insist on that. You can take your *Puck*."

Cooper looked from one to the other in perplexity, but he was still broadly agrin.

CHAPTER XI

CONCERNING BEES—AND WASPS

BANNATYNE came to a conclusion, on which he flattered himself as a testimony to his logical powers. It stimulated also his weakening faith in his detective qualities. In turning over in his mind the affair of Miss Ashcroft, he was struck by a thought which he had previously entertained but casually. Why did Miss Ashcroft take the trouble to mark all the doors in the corridor, seeing that he could always easily ascertain which was her room, and seeing, moreover, that he must inevitably identify her? Miss Ashcroft could have had no reason for concealment; indeed, concealment was impossible for her. Obviously, then, the concealment was necessary for the protection of some one else. He had marked a door from the cracks in which flowed light. It could not have been Miss Ashcroft's, since she had nothing to hope from attempting to confuse him among a number of doors. He had not been at all careful; he had merely looked for a room in which there was a light, when he had gone back. If the room was not Miss Ashcroft's, whose was it? Evidently the chain of reasoning led him to the assumption that the real thief of the shoe, the Dryad, occupied a room in the corridor,

and that she it was who had in desperation played the part of *Morgiana* with the doors.

This seemed to take him quite a long way. He was "getting warm," as the nursery game has it, and he began also to get excited. It was now his clear duty to investigate the corridor and find out its tenants; and that duty he would have undertaken forthwith had it not been for the intervention of the dinner hour.

He sat between Miss Arden and Lady Cynthia Dane, and blessed his luck, or Lady Coombe's kindly forethought. No sooner was he established than he was aware that Lady Cynthia was regarding him with new interest. "I heard about the swarm," she began impulsively. "Miss Latham told me. I do think it was splendid of you!"

"It was only presence of mind, Lady Cynthia," he protested; but what woman ever listened to such protests? She shook her head.

"I simply can't endure wasps or bees," she declared.

"Wasps!" said Captain Madgwick from the other side of her. "They're awfully spiteful beggars. They're awfully cute, too. Ever see them saw off a bit of meat as large as life, and carry it off from the lunch table?"

"Oh, bees are much worse!" said Lady Cynthia. "Their sting's worse."

"Quite right, Lady Cynthia," said Bouverie's deliberate voice across the table. "Bees take a positive delight in stinging; they'd sooner sting than not. Wasps, on the other hand, are amiable, rather reckless, improvident fellows, who would live and let live, if you'd let 'em.

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They blunder in and out of your house like good Bohemians."

"They're handsomer than bees, too," said Miss Arden, attracted by these exchanges across the table.

"The evident sense of the house is in favor of wasps," announced Bouverie solemnly.

"Not mine," said Mrs. Everard Battye, shuddering. "I can't bear either of them. They drive me distracted if they're about."

The topic widened its area, but did not set the table ablaze. To concentrate a large party on a subject is well-nigh impracticable, unless you are in the position of either a preacher or a lecturer. Wasps and bees buzzed about the table, so to speak, and reached Kitty Latham, where she sat toward the bottom. By this time they had been forgotten by the party which had set them on the wing. Young Gay formally asked Miss Latham whether she liked bees or wasps, and seemed to think a good deal hung on the question. She was pale of face, but she shook her head, smiling whitely. She did not want to think about the matter; she was too near to her shock, and the strange experience she had had with Bannatyne. Her eyes roved along the table and caught his. He greeted her with a smile, and raised his glass impulsively. Miss Latham's pallor disappeared in a suffusion of soft color, and she turned to her neighbor, who was explaining the alteration in the cast.

"It's rather a bore being *Puck*, you know, but one must do one's best. I don't suppose I shall make more than an ordinary fool of myself."

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"It gave her a tremendous shock, poor Kitty," said Lady Cynthia, who had noticed her friend's glance.

"No wonder," he said sympathetically. "She looks delicate."

"She is rather delicate," said she, "but she has plenty of life."

"Ah, her mother had vitality also—wonderful."

Lady Cynthia looked up at him. "You knew Mrs. Latham?" she asked with interest.

"I had the privilege of her friendship," he said, rather shortly for him; and after a pause, "Lady Cynthia, I wish you'd have some champagne. You take nothing."

"I almost never do," she said, smiling.

"On this auspicious evening try a glass," he pleaded.

She shook her head. "It would get into my head," she declared.

"Well, we're all mad, you know," he said. "It won't matter; we're all stark, staring mad here. Of course you know that."

She smiled again at his extravagance. "I know some are," she said, getting under his guard, which was always loose and reckless.

He acknowledged the hit with a bow. "Well, please tell me some one who isn't mad, except yourself and Miss Latham, let us say. That's why I wanted you to drink the champagne. Your excessive sanity is noticeable. In a company of the insane, gone mad under the white moon, you are, Lady Cynthia, excruciatingly conspicuous. I fly when I see you."

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“Was that why you fled this afternoon?” burst from her ere she was aware; and then she bit her lip in annoyance.

Bannatyne looked at his glass, and twisted it in the light for a moment before replying. “I wish I could persuade you,” he said; “but you are adamantine. I fear you. No; I did not fly from you this afternoon because you were not mad, because I then had some hopes that you were. I fled, I retreated reluctantly, rather, because I had an imperative mission.”

“To learn your part?” she inquired, with a little smile which might have meant disdain.

He glanced at her, and noted the smile. He was very quick.

“No, not to learn my part,” he said. “I wonder if I might tell you.”

“I’m not curious,” she declared.

“No, but the burden is getting too much for me,” said he. “I feel I must go out and cry to the grasses and reeds, you know, like the man in the myth, ‘the king has ass’s ears!’”

“There is ample opportunity here,” said Lady Cynthia.

“You are very young and very heartless,” he told her whimsically. “I wish I had told the bees. That’s always the safest.” Lady Cynthia’s face relaxed, and her fine, expressive eyes grew milder; they lost their coldness and their distance.

“Poor Kitty!” she said. “Was it long?”

“I couldn’t guess,” he said. “It seemed a whole

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day, but I suppose it was only a few minutes. She behaved pluckily, but she was terribly scared."

"She says she was a coward," said Lady Cynthia. "She is ashamed of herself."

"Oh, no, no!" he protested. "I ought to know."

"She will be glad to think that," said Lady Cynthia. "I wish you'd tell her that."

"I will," he declared, and resented Madgwick's action in claiming her attention. They had seemed to be getting on so pleasantly. Her coldness was gone, nor did she confront him from a distance with frosty virgin eyes. If there was not warmth in them, at least there was light. She had been quite animated in speaking of her friend. He turned with a sigh to Miss Arden, and in an unscrupulous swoop tore her from her neighbor on the other side.

"Could you tell me Miss Grant-Summers's name?" he inquired.

"Name?" She slowly realized. "Oh, certainly—Constance!"

"Thank you so much," he replied. "A handsome name, as handsome as——"

"As the owner," she finished tentatively, and smiling.

"I was going to say, 'as appropriate,'" he declared. "But I have had the honor of Miss Grant-Summers's acquaintance too short a time to presume; so I gladly adopt your emendation. But in reality I didn't want to know her name. She is there, and that is enough. I needed a peg, an excuse, something to climb down by."

"Something to climb down by?" Miss Arden looked puzzled.

Concerning Bees—and Wasps

“Up by, rather,” he said. “I wanted some one to throw me a rope. I wanted an opening—oh, I wanted just a ladder, a sufficient jumping-off place. The fact is, it was your name I wanted, Miss Arden.”

“Mine!” Miss Arden’s clear, pale face suffered no change, though she smiled faintly. “Oh, but you know mine. You must have heard mine.”

“No, you’re only Miss Arden to the world,” he explained. “There is only one Miss Arden; so she needs no other distinguishing marks. She shines by herself.”

“Then why distinguish her by inquiring her fore-name?” she asked lightly.

“True,” he replied. “There is no necessity; but I have insatiable desires. I’m sure it beseems her. I collect names as some lunatics do stamps and picture cards. I am a harmless lunatic.”

“I do not see,” said Miss Arden serenely, “why I should indulge a morbid passion for collecting.”

“Then you’re either a Sarah or a Maria,” he decided. “When people hesitate, I know they’re one or the other. You’re Maria I think . . . I fear.”

Still faintly amused, Miss Arden glanced at him. “I can’t rest under that stigma,” she said, entering into his frolicsome mood. “I give in. Your unholy curiosity shall be gratified. But I warn you, it is a very odd name. Perhaps it’s even worse than Maria.”

He looked at her expectantly, and her lips parted smilingly in a charming ripple of sound.

“Mirabel!”

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“Mirabel!” he murmured. “Why, it’s perfectly exquisite; it’s wonderful! And to think I never knew it, and that all these months have lacked the liquid beauty of that name! Goodness! You should wear it graven in a band upon your brow; it should whisper in the rustle of your gown; your phylacteries should be bordered with it. It’s heaven’s own music. Mirabel!”

He pronounced it softly, entreatingly, drawing the word out slowly, in low cadence, as if loath to part with it. And now Miss Arden’s face had at last surrendered; the charge of delicate blood had suffused it slightly, and in her new color she took on a new beauty. She laughed at his extravagance.

“You like it?” she said in a pleased voice.

“Like it!” he echoed. “Do you know, until I heard it, three minutes ago, I had not dreamed of such music. I had always devoutly believed in Shakespeare’s heroines. What a royal list of names! Imogen, Celia, Miranda, Sylvia, Julia, Mariana, Juliet, Rosalind, Olivia, Viola, Hermione—oh, the list is unending!—Desdemona, Cordelia, and our own *Hermia*—and *Helena*.” His eyes rested on hers. “But Mirabel surpasses all. It is paramount.”

“I’ve always thought it so fantastic,” said Miss Arden.

“No, fantastic is that which is out of keeping with life. This is in key with life. It corresponds with you. It fits you like a glove—or a shoe,” he added deliberately.

The color was slowly receding in the fair face, but a certain unusual vivacity lingered in the expression.

Concerning Bees—and Wasps

She was at the moment buttoning her glove, for dessert had already been handed round; and almost as she finished Lady Coombe rose.

When the ladies were gone the men moved into closer relationship. Bouverie was keeping his immediate neighbors on the grin with some tale of an Irish M.P., and Sir Edward Coombe's hearty laugh rang down the room. From that the talk drifted to a more serious aspect of politics. Would the Government last? Were they playing for a fall? What would be the issue at the next general election?

"We must ask Eastwood," said Sir Edward. "He's coming to-morrow."

"Is he?" said a gray, lean local squire, brightening. "I'd like to know what they're really going to do about the army. Lord Eastwood ought to know."

"Under secretaries don't know anything," said Bouverie.

"No doubt he'll tell you if you ask him," said Hancock, sipping his port.

In a bunch together, the youths, as Bouverie termed them, were discussing the merits of port and claret knowingly.

"He's not come down to talk politics," said Sir Edward. "He wants to get away from them, I should say. There are other attractions."

"Is it settled?" asked Bouverie.

Sir Edward beckoned to a footman. "Cigars," said he, and then to Bouverie: "Pretty well, I fancy. Ferris, have you quite finished your wine? If so, we'll smoke.

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Yes, I fancy Lady Fallowfield would like it fixed up definitely. It's not formal, I believe. Try those, Bouverie."

Bannatyne had pricked up his ears, for he was of an inquisitive nature, and quick to understand, moreover.

"Are you referring to Lady Cynthia?" he asked his host.

Sir Edward, lighting a cigar, paused. "Yes," he grunted, "this will settle it, I suppose. Fallowfield's no money, and, of course, Eastwood's heaps. A good thing all round. A rising man, too."

"Eastwood would rise higher and faster, if he could keep his mouth shut," said Bouverie. "But he *will* be talking, and his 'wits are not so blunt, as God help, I would desire they were.'"

"Does that mean he's dull?" asked Bannatyne.

"He's the triumph of the commonplace," said Bouverie. "He's never said a witty thing and never done a wise one. But he goes on safely, hedged about by conventions, and he has the safeguards of his order, being a peer."

Bannatyne got up. "Damn Lord Eastwood!" he breathed softly to himself as he left the room.

He looked at his watch and found it was close on nine. The dinners were shortened to leave room for the rehearsal by moonlight, which was Lady Coombe's hobby. He resolved to join the ladies, and went part of the way to the drawing-room; then he changed his mind and came back to the entrance to the terrace. He

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would smoke out in the fresh air, with the moon upon him. He remained there for some moments wrapped in thought, and then he heard footsteps behind him. Thinking the men had emerged at last, he turned, and confronted two girls linked arm in arm. He recognized them, and threw away the end of his cigar.

"You remember the address to the moon, Lady Cynthia," he said, with his hand to the heavens:

"Say, why is everything
Either at sixes or at sevens? "

Why is it? "

"Is it?" asked Lady Cynthia. "Has anything happened?"

"Everything happens," he said.

"You mean the cast's wrong?" she asked.

"Casts are generally wrong," he answered, "on the stage and in life. I hate casts, whether nature's or Hancock's. The only respectable thing about us is that we've got two wonderful fairies."

Miss Latham seemed to emerge a little from the shadow of her companion.

"I didn't thank you, Mr. Bannatyne," she began hurriedly and shyly. "I couldn't at the time; I was so upset. But now will you let me? I want so awfully to tell you how grateful I am to you for your bravery and quickness and—and goodness."

"My dear Miss Latham," said Bannatyne whimsically, "not for my clumsiness, nor for my dullness? Really those are the only two qualities I find that I

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displayed. On making inquiries I have discovered two interesting facts: one is, that bees on the swarm are rarely vicious, and the other, that I might have shaken them off upon the floor, or into my hat, without any danger and with ease."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "I'm sure——"

He smiled at her, shaking his head. "It's a positive fact," he assured her. "So, you see, I've only ruined a pretty dress for nothing. I'm a hero under false pretenses. And if you will do me a favor, Miss Kitty, you will suppress all mention of the event; for, as I can't perform as a hero in it, I should only cut a ridiculous figure. My vanity would be hurt. Please, keep a secret."

Miss Latham took his request very seriously. "Oh, but I have told some one," she said in dismay. "I told Lady Cynthia, and I told——"

She hesitated. "Then I must live it down," he said humorously. "Lady Cynthia and you must help me. If you will engage to keep up my spirits this evening in *Titania's* Glade perhaps I shall pull through. Conceive what it must be, Lady Cynthia, to think you're doing something heroic, and to discover it was something ridiculous!"

"It wasn't at all ridiculous," said Lady Cynthia promptly. She put her arm in Kitty Latham's again, and they moved slowly along the terrace, for at that moment a stream of men issued from the French windows leisurely. Lady Coombe's voice, too, sounded shrilly in the background.

Concerning Bees—and Wasps

"I'm sorry I told anyone, Cynthia," said Miss Latham penitently, "but I really didn't know."

"Nonsense! it doesn't matter," said her friend, and after a moment added: "I really think he said that for your sake."

"For my sake!" echoed Kitty. But Lady Cynthia did not explain, for Mr. Gay, who had stalked them suddenly arrived on the scene.

"Awfully jolly night for a rehearsal, isn't it?"

Bannatyne mingled with the group and talked, and presently it began to disperse, knots moving off to the trysting place in the glade. Bannatyne, who had been detained by an argument with Sir Edward, went into the house to get a hat, and in passing through the picture gallery met Miss Ashcroft. She stopped him, her well-defined and somewhat thin features relaxing in a smile.

"Did you say you were playing *Puck*?" she asked abruptly.

"I didn't say I was playing anything," answered Bannatyne. "But I don't think it's *Puck*. I shouldn't suit the part. *Puck* is a mischievous, meddlesome person, devoted to tricks, and making other people uncomfortable. He is malicious."

Miss Ashcroft appeared to reflect. "No," she said, almost absently, "I don't think you are malicious, but you're pretty mischievous. Do you say your prayers?"

"Say my—" Bannatyne was a little confounded at this remarkable inquisition.

"I mean," said Miss Ashcroft, putting the book she

carried under her arm, "do you, when you go to bed, take off with your clothes your temperament, and grow serious? What sort of Bannatyne goes to bed? Oh, no; I forget. I know the sort of Bannatyne that goes to bed."

"And I think I know the sort of Miss Ashcroft that—" He was sharply interrupted.

"Oh, dear me, you don't—only part of her—not all, by a long way! I conclude, then, you ring hollow. What's under that sounding cymbal? If I tapped you over here—just here—what should I find?" She put a slender finger, on which shone a fine opal, toward his heart.

He looked doubtful. "You may try, if you like," he said. "I don't think anyone has made the experiment. I'm just as anxious to know as you, I assure you."

"I don't think I'm much anxious to know," she said dryly. "It was only passing curiosity—a vice excusable in a woman, but not in a man."

"A man has never *only* curiosity," he told her. "His interest is always involved, and interest is not curiosity. A woman is nakedly inquisitive; a man is anxious to see the truth, and see it whole. His scrutiny of things is part of his design to make a unity of nature; in effect it is architectonic and analytic at once."

"That sounds very fine," said the lady. "I'll think it over." She turned to go.

"Won't you give me the honor of accompanying me to the glade of *Titania*?" he asked diffidently.

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“Good heavens, no!” said Miss Ashcroft. “What should I do down there? I’m not playing *Puck*.”

“I thought you might be going to witness the rehearsal,” he explained weakly.

She shook her head emphatically. “I’m going to enjoy a quiet time of reading, now that all the noisy people are away.”

He glanced at her book, and discerned it to be a novel of Balzac’s. She nodded, and left him, but he was arrested by her voice ere he had gone half a dozen paces:

“Did you get stung?”

“No,” said he, “not by the bees.”

She smiled covertly, as if appreciatory of this *riposte*.

“The wasp season will soon be on,” said she.

“Oh, I’m not looking forward to it,” he said hurriedly. “I don’t want any more wasps than—than there are.”

“There might be chances in the season which are wanting now,” pursued Miss Ashcroft thoughtfully. “You might build up a new reputation. You might save some one else.”

“I think I would leave the wasps to do their worst,” he declared. “You see, I’ve suffered so much myself.”

“Well,” she said over her shoulder as she resumed her way, “go to *Titania’s* Glade and enjoy yourself. There are no wasps there—nor bees, either; only honey.”

“Well, you see, I have to go—they expect me,” he called out, as she went.

CHAPTER XII

TITANIA'S GLADE

A PLEASANT breeze swept the embayed little valley which had already come to be known as *Titania's Glade*. The moon was behind the elbow of the hill, so that the actual theater of the performance was still in shadow, but the brightness of the wilderness upon the farther slope advertised the rising luminary. Bannatyne had walked solitary to the scene, and was now engaged in identifying the people. There was plenty of confusion under that ample shadow of night, for the moon had been counted on, and Lady Coombe was petulant, as though it had been Hancock's fault that Diana delayed her coming.

"I can't see at all," she complained peevishly, "and I know perfectly well that I shall miss my footing on this broken ground."

"It's all part of the practice," said Hancock shortly, for he was in no humor for polite indulgence, and he had always been opposed to these nocturnal rehearsals.

"Isn't he a brute?" said Bannatyne sympathetically, and Lady Coombe turned to him for consolation.

"Mr. Bannatyne, would you mind feeling if that's a hole, just under my foot? I daren't move, and— Oh, thanks, I thought it might be. Please give me your arm. This is so very uneven. Where do I lie down,

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Mr. Hancock? Mr. Hancock, please, where do I lie down?"

Hancock, distracted by various conflicting calls on him, turned:

"Eh? Oh, anywhere, Lady Coombe!"

"I'm afraid there's some gorse about here," remarked Peter Bouverie. "I think I can remember it."

"Oh, where? Oh, Mr. Bouverie, do find out, please!" said poor Lady Coombe. "It would be dreadful if I lay down on gorse. I couldn't stand it. Mr. Hancock, Mr. Bouverie says there's some gorse here."

"There's some bracken over here, Lady Coombe," said Gay. "I don't think you'll find it uncomfortable, as I accidentally fell on it just now, and it did not really hurt."

"Well, let us make a start," called out Hancock's stentorian voice. "*Theseus, Hippolyta, Lysander, Hermia*—come along!"

The players engaged in the first scene gravitated toward the stage manager, who was standing on a log.

"If *Hermia* would only take *Demetrius*, we shouldn't have to go through this scene at all," whispered Bannatyne to Miss Arden.

"Indeed!" she retorted, as they separated. "What about *Helena*? You seem to think her affections transferable."

"I wish they were," he sighed.

The rehearsal began, and Hancock gave it grudging approval when it ended.

"Thank goodness!" said Bannatyne. "Interval for

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a cigarette, Lady Cynthia. You don't come on till the second act. Let's see if we can shift the moon up a bit."

The girl strolled away with him after a moment of hesitation. "My scene will be on very soon," she said.

"Then let them wait. It makes them realize your importance," he said, lighting a cigarette. "Why are we better than our fathers, Lady Cynthia? They used to style that moon Old Oliver. I wonder why. To us she is a sacrosanctity.

'Yon rising moon that looks for us again
How oft hereafter shall she wax and wane;
How oft hereafter, rising, look for us
Through this same garden, and for one in vain?'

She will look for me in vain. When that time comes, Lady Cynthia, turn down an empty glass, to the memory of one who nearly snored in church."

"Please don't jest," said she. "You've no right to spoil a beautiful passage."

"No, I haven't," he admitted. "But I'm not feeling very greatly pleased with the world at present. Besides, it's not altogether a jest." He paused; they were now in the deep shadows of the wood. "I suppose you are."

"I!" said Lady Cynthia. "Yes, I think it's a very pleasant world."

"It's a very fine world to live in,
To spend or to lend or to give in,"

quoted Bannatyne. "It has nothing but sunshine in the eyes of youth—and moonshine. I don't blame youth. Yes, all's right with the world."

She hesitated a moment, and then answered: "It might be very pleasant for you, mightn't it?"

"You're thinking of money," he said. "On the score of money, I suppose yes. I have been fortunate in prudent forefathers. But they have got back on me in other ways. Look at the temperament they have left me."

"Isn't it a very happy temperament?" asked Lady Cynthia lightly.

"Exactly; no one takes me seriously," he complained.

"Isn't that—well, isn't it—don't you give the impression—" she was beginning, when he interrupted her.

"Oh, you mean, isn't it my own fault? Of course it is, but there speaks heredity. We are such stuff as dreams are made of. A hundred generations have dreamed me, and here I am, but I am not I, any more than you are you."

All this was very confusing, and Lady Cynthia felt it so. She did not know if Bannatyne was at all in earnest, or was talking of deep things beyond her. She answered nothing, therefore, but simply adverted to the rehearsal.

"I must be getting back."

He turned obediently. "I hear we're to be reënforced to-morrow," he observed.

"Reënforced?"

"The Government will give us the light of its countenance. Lord Eastwood comes."

"Yes, I heard so," said she, and he could detect

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nothing in her voice, neither alacrity nor self-consciousness.

"I have met him twice, I think," he went on. "He is a rising man."

"Yes." Lady Cynthia seemed to assent, and that was all.

"You know him?" he inquired, pushing his researches further.

"Oh, yes," she said; "quite well."

Bannatyne felt he was baffled. He gave it up, and they walked back in silence. The moon was now peering through the trees.

"We have succeeded," he observed, waving his hand toward it. "We can always succeed in what we undertake."

"You must speak for yourself, Mr. Bannatyne," she returned pleasantly. "I often fail. Please crow for yourself. I will not be associated with you."

"Lady Cynthia!" rose on the evening air. It was Hancock.

"I must go," she said with perturbation. "They're waiting."

She ran lightly across the patches of yellow moonlight, and she ran, to Bannatyne's eyes, like a nymph in the train of Diana. The miracle of her supple grace affected him strangely; why, he knew not, nor cared. But his thoughts had not time to center long on that flight, for Chloe Merrington met him.

"Oh, Mr. Bannatyne," she cried, "where *have* you been? You have missed something. Oh, the cobbler is

simply splendid! I never laughed so much in my life. You should have heard him saying

‘The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison-gates.’

Oh, it was the most delightful singsong you ever did hear! But I don't think Lady Coombe likes it. She seems very cross.”

“Good heavens!” ejaculated Bannatyne, “I clean forgot *Bottom*. I wouldn't have missed it for worlds! Oh, Miss Chloe, why didn't you come after me?” he said reproachfully.

Chloe laughed awkwardly. “I didn't know,” she said. “I thought you were——”

“Yes, I was, but I've missed *Bottom*. No, I haven't. I shall hear him at his best presently. Stand here with me and listen, Miss Chloe. Who's that in the white ring of moonlight?”

“Why, Lady Cynthia,” said his companion in surprise.

“Oh, yes; dazzle my eyes, or do I see Mr. Gay? It is; it isn't; it is. How will he enter, think you—with chimney-pot hat in his hand, and his eyeglass? ‘Enter from opposite sides, a *Fairy* and *Puck*.’ Hush, here they come, and he *has* got his opera hat on. No, but he *does* wear his eyeglass.”

“‘How now, spirit! whither wander you?’”

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The tone was high clarion; the accents were the faultless accents of Oxford. Young Gay fingered his eyeglass in his eye to direct it more closely upon Lady Cynthia Dane, who advanced to greet him. Her voice killed the humor of his for Bannatyne's ears; it was sweet, low, melodious, and it carried clear and far, like low cadences, or the musical ripple of a brook.

“Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire . . .”

Bannatyne's thoughts passed off into a reverie, through which the music of the verse beat softly, and then suddenly Lady Coombe and Bouverie crowded the grassy stage with their respective trains. The magnificent poetry of the succeeding scene, more particularly of *Titania's* contribution to it, fell upon ears attuned to the occasion. Whatever Hancock might say, the setting enhanced the effect, and in so doing stimulated the imagination of the performers. In knots those not engaged in the scene listened in silence and appreciation; and Bouverie, as Bannatyne admitted to himself, rose to the occasion very well. His was not a feverish *Oberon*; he was perhaps too deliberate a fairy king, but at least it was a dignified performance, and the delivery was impressive from those careful lips.

“That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd . . .”

Bouverie lifted an arm and pointed, and in the glow of the moonlight the action had its dramatic value. Bannatyne turned to look. Chloe followed the direction of the arm involuntarily; it was as if she expected to see "Cupid all arm'd."

"It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milkwhite, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it, love-in-idleness. . . ."

"Love-in-idleness," murmured Bannatyne, thrilling at the charm of the word, and was not aware that he was pressing Chloe's arm. But she was quite conscious of it, and did not mind; indeed, unconsciously she drew a little closer to him.

"There comes my *Helena*," he said, "with that beastly *Demetrius*."

"But *Hermia's* yours, Mr. Bannatyne," said his companion.

"So she is—of course; I was mixing it up," he declared. "This story's very bewildering, isn't it? I do wish you'd been *Puck*."

They stood watching until *Demetrius* and *Helena* made their exit, and *Oberon* had given the cue.

"*Puck—Puck—where's Puck?*" called out Hancock sharply. "Come, Gay, where are you?"

"Coming," said a high voice, and of a sudden a figure rolled in a sort of somersault into the arena.

"Good Lord, what on earth's this?" asked Hancock.

"Hurt yourself?" inquired Bouverie anxiously.

Gay rose to his feet, panting. "It's an idea of my own," he explained complacently, "for an entrance for

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Puck. You see, he's been putting a girdle round the world, and it would be only natural that a romping spirit returning from a long journey——"

"Oh, fudge, man! get out, and come in in a proper way," said Hancock wrathfully.

"Really, my dear Mr. Hancock," protested the aggrieved *Puck*, "you must really allow an individual interpretation in matters of this sort. My notion was——"

"You can tell us that afterwards," interrupted Hancock shortly. "Get along now."

With a very bad grace, and compressed lips, Gay went on with the part; but, as he confided to Bannatyne later, "for two pins I would have chucked the part. It's infernal incivility on Hancock's part. He presumes too much on his position. We're not professionals, to be ordered about."

Presently it was time for *Lysander's* interlude with *Hermia* in the wood. It was the scene they had rehearsed, or begun to rehearse, in the early afternoon, and both remembered it. Miss Grant-Summers's face was too shadowy for him to see much in it, but he knew what expression it must bear.

"Did you find my boots?" she whispered.

"I've discovered they're not fives," he whispered back.

"Do you think we'd better lie down here?" she asked as they reached the end; "I don't much like it."

"There's no need to," he assured her; "but Lady Coombe insists on lying herself. I'll lie for both of

us." He did so. "Don't turn a somersault into my eye, please," he remarked as Gay approached. "Thank you." Miss Grant-Summers stood beside him while *Puck* soliloquized, and *Demetrius* and *Helena* made their appearance, and she talked in an undertone.

"Did you go up to the downs this afternoon?"

"No; was there an expedition?"

"We looked for you."

"Please give me another chance. Has Mr. Atherton recovered his breath and his head?"

"Head?"

"Yes; he had lost both, when I passed him this afternoon. So had Captain Madgwick."

She laughed, and moved a little way as *Helena*, in accordance with stage directions, drew near and bent over him.

"Lysander! on the ground!

Dead? or asleep? I see no blood, no wound . . ."

"You'd much better give up the pretense of caring for *Demetrius*," he murmured to Miss Arden, who bit her lips to keep herself from smiling as she finished her sentence.

"You don't care a bit for him," he went on. "There's only one person for you, and he——"

Helena had finished, and he himself broke off to take up his cue.

"Transparent Helena! Nature shows art,

That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart . . ."

"I told you so," he muttered. "It's preposterous.

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'Where is Demetrius? Oh, how fit a word
Is that vile name to perish on my sword!'"

He spoke with exceptional fervor, as he rose to his feet and reached his arms as if to seize Miss Arden.

"Wait a bit, *Lysander*—not too fast," said Hancock the adamantine. "You don't go near *Helena* till the next speech."

"Really, Hancock, you must allow—" began Bannatyne with dignity, but was interrupted.

"Oh, shut up, and go on!" said Hancock.

"At any rate, I'm right here," he said to Miss Arden presently under his breath. "And I'm not going to abandon this 'individual interpretation.'"

'... And leads me to your eyes; where I o'erlook
Love's stories, written in love's richest book.'"

He thought he detected a significant raillery in *Helena's* opening lines:

"'Wherefore was I to this keen mockery born?'"

and he left the scene, explaining to her that she put too much emphasis into her words. As they were thus engaged, Ferris came up, displaying signs of being disconcerted.

"Miss Arden, I think we might go through that next scene together, if you don't mind," he said.

"Oh, but I do mind!" she protested. "I'm tired enough of it. Wait till it comes on. I don't like rehearsals within rehearsals," she pronounced.

Ferris stood twirling his mustache in annoyance.

Titania's Glade

"We mustn't miss this," said Bannatyne to the lady. "This is the *pièce de résistance*. 'Act III. Titania lying asleep.' If you feel you must laugh, Miss Arden, appeal to me, and I'll take remedies against it. As for me, if I'm going to explode I'll transfer my thoughts elsewhere; I'll think of some romantic name like 'Mirabel.' Stand close, as the master says."

Ignoring Ferris, they drew up to the ring, where Hancock was marshaling his forces. Lady Coombe lay a little to one side, under the bracken, and upon a silk cushion. Cooper had his part to a nicety of glibness, and there was realism in the way he said:

"'A calendar! a calendar! look in the almanac.
Find out moonshine, find out moonshine.'"

This was abrupt and ordinary, but the verse sailed away on high notes like the recitation of a child.

"Be I to wear an ass's head to-night, sir?" he inquired with suppressed excitement of Hancock.

"No, we'll do without it to-night, Cooper; we'll have a dress rehearsal to-morrow—that will be time enough."

"Very well, sir." *Bottom* intoned again with a broad grin, and put to flight *Quince* and his companions.

"Say the song, Cooper; we haven't the music yet," said Hancock; and Cooper repeated it to a melancholy recitative of his own.

Lady Coombe sat up with languishing gestures.

"'I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again . . .'"

"If your ladyship was to lay this way, like," said

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Bottom with an ingratiating grin, "you'd be more comfortable. The ground's very hard for your ladyship, I'll reckon."

"It's all right, Cooper; go on," enjoined *Titania* crossly.

"Get along there, *Bottom*," called Hancock. "What are you doing?"

"I was only tidying her ladyship's cushion so as she could lay proper," said *Bottom* apologetically. "This ground's terrible hard, and a dew, too. That don't do for the likes of she. It's only young folks like as can stand layin' out like this. It breeds rheumatics powerful."

"Really, Mr. Hancock, this is absurd," declared the furious *Titania*, "and I never ought to have consented to—" Hancock jumped down from his perch and hastened to soothe her wounded vanity. The conversation was carried on in low tones which did not reach the circle of the audience. But Hancock presently went back, apparently having succeeded, and the rehearsal was resumed. It was, however, obvious that *Titania* was ruffled, and her lines were spoken with a bad grace, as it were under protest.

"'The moon, methinks, looks with a watery eye,'" remarked *Oberon* as he passed Bannatyne on his way to the entrance.

"Is it going to rain?" he asked back, glancing upward at the silent luminary. "I feel very guilty.

'And when she weeps, weeps every little flower
Lamenting some enforced chastity.' "

"You look like a conspirator," observed Miss Arden.

"I am it," he confessed; and at that moment arose a triumphant and abominable sound on the air.

"What has happened?" said Miss Arden in alarm.

"It sounded like a nightmare," said Bannatyne.

"But it may be beasts. I will protect you."

"What in the name of goodness may that be, Cooper?" Hancock was demanding in a shout.

"'Tis the ass, sir," said *Bottom*. "See, I be supposed to be wearing the ass's head."

"More individual interpretation," said Bouverie to Bannatyne.

Lady Coombe, from her position on her elbows among the bracken, shrugged her shoulders plaintively, despairingly.

"He was braying—good heavens!" said Hancock to the group about him.

"Be I not to bray, sir?" asked *Bottom*. "It do say something about his roarin' like a lion, and I thought that he would bray, too, sir."

"'Tie up my love's tongue; bring him silently,'" said Bannatyne to Miss Arden, who was shaking with laughter. "Let us not be a cause of offense to others. Lady Coombe will throw up the sponge if she suspects us of laughing. My face is quite straight; is yours? No, we must withdraw. Come, *Helena*; there's only a silly business between *Demetrius* and *Hermia* coming on. We don't want to witness it."

"I'm not so sure," said Miss Arden. "It might be interesting."

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"Our affair is much more interesting," he said. "Do you know, I think Mr. Ferris can't possibly play the part of *Demetrius* in an imperial. Can he, now?"

"I really hadn't thought about it," said she.

"But consider the anachronism! An Athenian of Elizabethan times in an imperial! It's monstrous! No; he must be compelled to shave."

"Oh, that's nothing to do with us," she said smilingly.

"On the contrary, it has—with you. I wish it hadn't. Excuse me putting it bluntly, but you're besotted on him. He's not worth it; take it from me."

"It is obvious that neither of you is," said Miss Arden with her pleasant manner.

"'Oh, why should you think that I should woo in scorn?'" he demanded.

"'You do advance your cunning more and more,'" she responded. "'These vows are *Hermia's*, will you give her o'er?'"

"Most certainly," replied Bannatyne seriously. "'I had no judgment when to her I swore'; and, moreover, I put her to the test, and she failed."

"Test!" said his companion wonderingly.

"Yes, she underwent the necessary ordeal. You know there were of old times several ordeals to which suspected people were exposed. If you were suspect as thief, for example, you were tried by fire, and, if innocent, emerged triumphantly—also scathless. If you were supposed to be a witch, you were rolled in the water, and if you drowned you were innocent, and if

you weren't you were burned to death as guilty. It was a splendid institution. Better be safe than sorry, you know. You're sure of your witch that way."

"Mirabel" laughed. "But what ordeal did poor *Hermia* undergo?" she asked.

"Well," he hesitated, "she was suspected of being a sort of witch." "Mirabel" opened her eyes. He nodded, "Yes, it was a bad affair, and we don't like to talk of it. But she came out of it all right; she wasn't a witch, and so she was drowned—at least she ought to have been, only she was let off."

"*Lysander!*" called Hancock in the distance.

"We're on," said Miss Arden; "we must go back." She began to move quickly toward the central scene, and he followed, reflecting.

"I wonder if she would pass the ordeal," he thought, and arrived in time to enter upon her skirts, with his plea for her love. Close by he could see Ferris's eyes watching them, for Ferris was lying in the much-frequented bracken and the moon shone on him; and presently he burst out, jumping to his feet:

"O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!"

"Steady," enjoined Hancock. "A bit too rushed. Try again. Now, *Lysander!*"

Ferris was fervid, but nervous of manner; he abandoned himself to the delirium of love-making. He sighed profoundly, heaving from his bosom deep breaths. In that immensity love tossed on stormy seas. But his passion did not appear to affect the spiritual *Helena*.

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“‘Oh, spite! Oh, hell!’”

she said delicately, and broke off. “Oh, Mr. Hancock, I don’t think one ought quite to say that. Isn’t it a little——”

“Say ‘Oh, blank!’” suggested Bouverie benevolently.

“I don’t see any objection to it; but if you mind, try ‘heaven,’” said Hancock.

“Yes, that will do,” said *Helena*, trying it over in her mind.

“‘Oh, spite! Oh, heaven!’” said Miss Grant-Summers in the outskirts to her neighbor, who happened to be Madgwick. “Rather absurd, isn’t it?”

“Oh, well, ‘hell,’ you know,” said the captain mildly. “A girl doesn’t much like to commit herself to swear words, naturally.”

“No, of course not,” said Miss Grant-Summers sweetly.

“A girl at my daughter’s school,” observed Lady Merrington contemplatively, “used to use dreadful words. They say she used to use words they’d never even heard of.”

“Really!” said Madgwick, interested. “By Jove! she must have been a terror.”

Miss Grant-Summers tittered, but Lady Merrington proceeded oblivious of this unconscious reflection on pretty Chloe and Kathleen.

“Her father was governor of one of the prisons, so I suppose she caught it from the criminals,” she concluded.

"It's my cue," said Miss Grant-Summers, and left.

Lady Merrington resumed the story of her daughter's school life, finding an abstracted audience in Madgwick, whose ears and eyes were only for the stage, whereon the famous scene between the two pairs of lovers was in progress.

"'Why are you grown so rude? what change is this, sweet love,'"
declaimed Miss Grant-Summers.

"'Thy love! out tawny Tartar, out!

Out, loathed medicine! O hated potion, hence!'"

thundered Bannatyne. There was versimilitude in the voice:

"'Tis no jest

That I do hate thee, and love Helena.'"

Miss Grant-Summers warmed to her part. She threw open the silken wrap that hid her handsome shoulders, and struck herself on the bosom:

"'Puppet! why so? Ay, that way goes the game.

Now I perceive that she hath made compare

Between our statures . . .

How low am I, thou painted maypole? speak!

How low am I? I am not yet so low,

But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.'"

Bannatyne remembered that she had spoken in deprecation of the cattishness of this passage, but surely here was the vixen broken out, naked claw and teeth. She

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looked handsome as a fury, but she was not his dryad. His exchanges with *Helena* had excited his blood, and the scene went with a swing that delighted Hancock, who only interfered to restrain the overimpetuous Ferris. The single interruption came from an accident to Gay, who, as *Puck* misleading the rivals, had the misfortune, in going backward, to tumble into a gorse bush, whence he was extricated by both *Lysander* and *Demetrius*.

Finally *Lysander*, in the person of Bannatyne, aweary with his vain pursuit, lay down and slept, and *Demetrius*, at a little distance, followed his example; and yet again *Helena*, reëntering, slumbered also at a little distance; and once more *Hermia* followed suit.

Lysander raised his head and surveyed the prostrate forms. He thought he saw *Helena's* eyes directed toward him.

"Don't lie there," he whispered; "that doesn't give me a fair chance."

Helena's eyes shut, as if she had gone off again.

"We'll take that last act now," said Hancock's businesslike voice, "and then go back to the fourth. Now, then, Mrs. Battye."

Bannatyne breathed a sigh of relief. He got up and walked toward Miss Arden; she was seated on the ground, adjusting her cloak. Ere he could reach her, however, Ferris had forestalled him, and was addressing her with tender solicitude. So, turning away, he joined Miss Chloe Merrington, who was engaged in conversation with Walrond and another young man.

"That was first rate, Mr. Bannatyne," said Walrond.
"That went awfully well."

"Capital!" said Chloe.

"Ripping!" murmured the other young man.

"You relieve my anxiety," said Bannatyne. "But it's my private opinion that I shall get neither of them. I'm too greedy."

"Neither?" inquired Chloe.

"Yes, neither *Hermia* nor *Helena*. *Puck's* working against me. I've felt that ever since I got lost in the Wilderness last night. He's the presiding genius here."

The other young man, who, it turned out, was Atherton, guffawed.

"Old Gay," he said—"wasn't he ripping?"

"Now, if you'd only been *Puck*, Miss Chloe," pursued Bannatyne, "I could have been sure of you. You would have helped me."

She smiled at him appreciatively. "Well, you would have had to give me a hint," she said.

"Come, and I'll give you one now," he said coaxingly.

Chloe moved out of earshot of the others with him, and Walrond looked glumly after them.

"You haven't got a ghost of a show, my boy," said his friend Atherton consolingly.

"Miss Chloe, I'm tired of all this," said Bannatyne. "Let's go and galumph."

She shook her head, laughing. "I'm wanted here, and so are you."

"I'm evidently not wanted anywhere," he said

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gloomily, and, seeing a figure approaching, he raised his voice. "Miss Latham, will you take pity on me, and galumph?"

Kitty Latham came to a halt. "I don't understand," she said.

"It's a way of running downhill Mr. Bannatyne has invented," explained Chloe. "You do it on your toes," she said gayly.

"I don't think I could," said Miss Latham nervously.

"There, I told you so!" said Bannatyne. "Nobody wants me. Good gracious! that must be Cooper again. We're missing something. Let's go and see."

CHAPTER XIII

ALLEGRA AND PENSEROSA

It was with Kitty Latham that he walked back to the Hall when the rehearsal was over—a silent Kitty, a shy and trepidant Kitty.

“Do you know, Miss Latham,” he said, “why a cat is like a rosebud?”

“No,” said Miss Latham.

“Because if you put them in water they both come out,” he explained solemnly. Miss Latham laughed slightly. “I feel like a cat or a rosebud; they’ve put me in water—hot water—and I want to come out.”

“You came out strongly,” said shy Kitty shyly.

“Oh, Kitty,” he smiled appreciatively, “how like your mother! We used to practice at . . . she had just that deftness of wit, and you . . .” He did not finish, and was silent a moment, but her face was charged with flame at his tone, at his address, at her own sprightly venture.

“I’m no use in that galley,” he resumed presently. “I’m really only some one trying to amuse myself, and that’s the hardest of all work. It is a beautiful world, isn’t it?” he asked, looking round and inhaling the wonderful night.

“‘The world is so full of such wonderful things,
I’m sure we should all be as happy as kings’

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and queens, of course. No, I hate the tawdry glitter of courts, and I don't want *Hermias* and *Helenas* and princes. And I want to ride to fairyland." He took her arm spontaneously and unconsciously. "See, child, see," he said earnestly. "There's the ragwort meadow, dun, russet, and golden in the light of day, but now an occluded and mysterious silver. You know what the Irish say? The ragwort is the fairy horse that gallops you away to fairyland. Don't ever have one near your doors, when you grow up and are married, or you'll lose all your children, Kitty. They are galloped over the borders of Faëry. I would I had the chance. I love all the fairies I have ever met."

Kitty's heart jumped under her bodice, and she looked on the radiant night, with his hand on her arm. Then he resumed his way, and she beside him, till they entered the courtyard and the Hall beyond. She wore no gloves, and under the strong light he noticed her hand.

"What is this?" he asked, taking it.

Kitty blushed. "It's nothing," she said, "only a little——"

"Poor child, you were stung, and I didn't know," he went on. "Did you use a blue-bag, Kitty, and has all the pain gone?" He spoke earnestly, and with a certain soothing tenderness of manner which was his own. "Does it hurt?"

"Only a little," she confessed shamefacedly.

"Blue-bag, ammonia, common soda, and onions—all are certain cures, Kitty, particularly onions. But I'm

sorry. Does it hurt? Poor hand!" He raised it softly and examined it. "Queen Eleanor sucked the poison from great Edward's hand. I wish I could from yours"; and quite by an impulse, and unexpectedly to himself and the girl, he touched the fingers with his lips.

The blood ran in Miss Latham's face, and then went out, leaving her pale. There was the sound of feet a little way off, and Bannatyne glanced round. It was Miss Ashcroft who was advancing toward them, her mouth inscrutably set, her gray eyes alert and commanding.

"I'm told singers and actors develop huge appetites," she said, pausing beside them. "I suppose you want your supper."

"We could eat a sheep," Bannatyne assured her, but Miss Latham was too confused to find words.

It was on her that the older lady directed her attention.

"Then, if there's not enough for you, you can have mine," she said briskly; "for I find I'm terribly overfed in modern houses. It's only a few hours since dinner. But we must go through the form of supper. We ought to be compelled to sup off a crust of bread for a week."

She spoke quite amiably, and with more of the air of supporting a conventional conversation than she had ever shown before. She was usually brusquer and more direct.

"We should all be better for love in a cottage," said Bannatyne.

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Miss Ashcroft turned her head slightly away. "An impossible ideal for some people," she said dryly.

"Where there were no wasps, of course," went on Bannatyne sweetly.

Miss Ashcroft's lips trembled, as if she suppressed some amusement. "I'm going to pretend to eat, at any rate," she said, marching off.

Bannatyne sat next to Lady Fallowfield at supper, but, despite his statement to Miss Ashcroft, he did not show much appetite. He drank a little Moselle, played with a few dishes, and talked. Lady Fallowfield was so old a friend that he wondered why he fought shy of asking her about Eastwood, and it seemed quite remarkable that when they rose the peer's name had not even been mentioned. The discussion in the smoking room, turning, as it did, on the rehearsal, bored him, and he went to bed at a comparatively early hour. In his corridor he met Lady Cynthia, and stopped to talk to her. Oddly enough, the first words that slipped from him concerned Eastwood, though his name was unspoken.

"Is it true that I am to congratulate you, Lady Cynthia?"

His smiling face looked into hers, as if deprecating any rebuff. After all, he had only heard a rumor, and had no right to repeat it, much less to broach it to her. Lady Cynthia flushed.

"I don't understand," she said coolly.

"If you don't, then am I a fool and a pig," he returned quickly. "Perhaps I listened to gossip. Forgive me."

"Indeed, there's nothing to forgive in congratulations," said she rather dryly.

"I should prefer to frame it this way," said he. "Good fortune and good fame be yours." There was something serious in his tone, though he still smiled. "I remember the long-legged little girl who helped me to church. I wish her all happiness."

"Thank you," said Lady Cynthia quietly, but the flush had not faded. She had the effect of keeping herself well in hand by an effort. He could see her gentle bosom moving fast.

"Good night," he said, and strode away.

Lady Cynthia went to her room and turned up the light. "Kitty!" she said in surprise.

Miss Latham sat in the window seat, contemplating the firmament of stars. "Cynthia," she turned quickly, "I wanted to say good night, dear. I missed you downstairs. There is such a crowd."

Lady Cynthia sat down in an armchair. "How do you think the play will do?" she asked.

"The play!" Her friend looked at her with a start, as if she had been thinking of something else. "Oh, I think it will be really funny," she said, smiling. "Don't you? That man Cooper is delightfully funny. Whose idea was it to get him?"

"I believe it was Mr. Bannatyne's," said Lady Cynthia, removing some tortoise-shell pins from her hair, which came tumbling down, a cataract of rolling brown tresses. There was a momentary silence, then Miss Latham broke it:

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"Were you talking out in the corridor?"

"Yes," said Lady Cynthia. "I met Mr. Bannatyne.

"What was he saying?"

Lady Cynthia, who was now before the mirror, bent forward, and the curtain of her hair swung slowly over her face. "Some of his usual silly talk," she said indifferently. Again silence fell.

"Do you think it really is silly?" asked Miss Latham at last, and hesitatingly.

"Oh, well, my dear, surely you can judge for yourself," said her companion. "He is terribly flippant."

"But he's very gay," pleaded Kitty.

"Oh, he's gay," admitted Lady Cynthia.

"I don't think he really means the nonsense he talks," said Miss Latham boldly. "I'm sure he's more—more serious than people think."

"My dear Kitty, how clever of you! It certainly is to be hoped he doesn't mean the nonsense he talks."

Kitty Latham rose. "Good night, dear," she said affectionately, and kissed her friend. "Shall you wear that white frock to-morrow when Lord Eastwood comes?"

Lady Cynthia let her silver-handled brush fall upon the table with unnecessary force. "Oh, how absurd you are, Kitty!" she cried. "I wish you wouldn't interfere with my arrangements."

"My dear Cynthia, I'm not," pleaded Kitty, in dismay at this outburst.

"No, but I'm tired of this attitude of everyone, and these whispers, and of Lord Eastwood this and Lord

Eastwood that," said the girl passionately. "Why can't they leave me alone?"

"I—I thought you liked him, and that——"

"People shouldn't think," interrupted Lady Cynthia. "I do like him. I have a great respect for him. He's an extremely clever man, and a good man, and he's got high ideals. He doesn't waste his time on nonsense, and — and private theatricals, and such silly things."

Recognizing her friend's unreasonable mood, Miss Latham was silent. Cynthia, she knew, was of an impulsive, hot temper, but she was not wont to break out like this. As she stood watching Lady Cynthia disrobe, the train of her thoughts was directed by one word in that outburst. Cynthia was evidently cooling down, as also was her custom.

"Did you know that he knew my mother?" asked Kitty.

"He—Lord Eastwood?" inquired the other.

"No; Mr. Bannatyne."

"How on earth should I have known that?" said Lady Cynthia irritably. "I'm not his historian. When did he know her?" she asked, letting her interest get uppermost.

"Oh, it must have been when I was a little girl," said Miss Latham. "He told me she was very beautiful, and she was witty." There was an increase of color on Miss Latham's face.

"How very ancient he must be!" said Lady Cynthia loftily.

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"Oh, no—" began her friend eagerly, but was not suffered to go further.

"Well, I'm tired, and I must go to bed, Kitty; so, good night," said the other.

But after Kitty had taken an affectionate farewell, Lady Cynthia put on her dressing gown and sat on the window seat which Kitty had occupied. The wind blew softly up the park and fanned her face pleasantly. Her heart was beating more steadily, but somehow she did not feel in the humor for sleep. It was very agreeable to sit and watch the stars as they dwindled toward the western valleys and dawn. She could understand why Kitty had been fascinated, even in the darkness. Perhaps darkness would even be better. On the thought she got up and switched off the light, afterwards resuming her seat. Yes, it was better, decidedly. The stars shone with more effulgence on the horizon; the moon was more benignant and more mystic. Cynthia could almost see it race across the blue space that was scattered with the fleece of broken clouds. The high wind sailed through the high trees and made a roaring. The gigantic aspens shook like thunder by the stream. Night was in possession of the sky, and settling slowly down. The scud galloped over the moon. Soon it would be dawn.

Lady Cynthia's thoughts swung round, and fluttered about Lord Eastwood.

A young girl's heart is as a garden of flowers where none may smell and pluck. In her ripe innocence she knew nothing, imagined nothing, and forecast nothing.

Life flows on an even tide to young girls who have not forestalled life. But Lady Cynthia's innocence was troubled; her heart of a sudden bred new fears and unwonted doubts. She would have questioned herself had she known how, but it all seemed a hopeless jumble of perplexities and sensations for which she could not account. Was it not better to leave things alone? to turn one's face away from unknown corners? to go still upon the even tide without questions and without wonder? The young girl has a remarkable capacity for burying her head like the ostrich, and refusing to see what she is vaguely aware must be there. Lady Cynthia blinked at the mental prospect, while her physical vision took in the sweep of a light heaven above unblinkingly. At last she rose with a sigh and crossed to her bed.

Next morning the sun rained heat from a bare sky quite early; it was full warm by nine o'clock, and most people breakfasted in the Hall at nine. By eight Lady Cynthia was astir in the garden, from which the heavy dews were already vanishing. Her dress was white, her face was blush-white, and her heart was singing. She could not have said why, for she had no definite thoughts in her head at all. She moved among the flowers, visibly content to be alive, with the same joy and unconsciousness of her life as the flowers themselves. The air from the hills was like wine in the blood. No thought of Lord Eastwood had crossed her mind since she had risen. She had forgotten all halting perplexities, and she dipped her nose in the roses and trilled a soft air musically.

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To her, thus happily engrossed, entered Oliver Lock, a ponderous volume of philosophy under one arm, and in his hand a stick with which he beat imaginary bars in the air. He whistled a stave and threw back his head, saw Lady Cynthia, and delivered a sweeping bow.

"How perfectly charming to find you out here!" he said. "My song is ready for you. Could you give me an appointment this morning?"

Lady Cynthia considered. "At eleven," she said. "I could manage that."

He bowed. "That would be delightful," and he strolled by her side in silence.

Lady Cynthia picked a flower here and there, and he watched her with obvious impatience. "How does your song go?" she asked as she stooped.

"Oh, so-so," he replied nonchalantly, and whistled as if it bored him. "Will you have a cigarette?" he asked, taking out his case.

"I don't smoke," said Lady Cynthia, smiling.

"Why? Do you object?" he asked.

"I've never tried, and don't want to," she replied.

"But that's not reasonable," he argued. "If you haven't tried, how do you know you wouldn't like it?"

"That would apply to everything—murder, theft, torture, and everything," she said, eying her bunch.

"Have you any influence with Miss Gladys?" he asked rather abruptly.

"Well, I don't know; I'd hardly like to say," said she. "Why?"

"Well, if you have, I wish you'd persuade her kindly *not* to put things in my bed."

"In your bed!"

"Yes. I lay down among a bushel or so of thorns last night, and it's just as if I was bitten all over. She's perfectly desolating. Children are all desolating."

Lady Cynthia choked down her laughter. "I'll speak to her about it," she said. "But how do you know it was she?"

"Oh, because I found the little beast's sash, or whatever you call it." He pulled it out of his pocket as he spoke and dangled it before her.

"I'll return it," said Lady Cynthia, "with a moral lesson, unless you would like to keep it as a memento."

He shrugged his shoulders, as if the suggestion were too inconsequent to require words, but a voice broke in at that moment:

"Here's a pretty thing, and a very pretty thing, and what's to be done with the owner of this pretty thing?"

Lady Cynthia turned, the sash in her hand.

"That is just it," she said, smiling. "The owner has been guilty of dreadful offenses."

"I know," said Bannatyne, affecting to examine the sash with solemnity. "Gladys."

She nodded. He looked at Oliver Lock.

"Prickles," he said again.

"You are a perfect detective," said Lady Cynthia.

"Bed," he added.

"How on earth do you know?" asked Lock in perplexity.

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"My dear sir," said Bannatyne indifferently, "you can't possibly mistake the signs. It's quite easy. No doubt you wondered how I came to a correct conclusion so quickly. The wonder should rather be that I did not come to it before—before seeing the sash, for example. You see, grown-ups, as a rule, don't wear sashes. *Ergo*, this must be worn by a girl of tender years—in other words, what is vulgarly called a flapper. Miss Gladys is the only flapper here." He spread out his fingers, as if that demonstration was over. "Next, you are astonished about the prickles; but if you will examine the bottom of the sash you will observe some thorns adhering. If you will also glance in the looking-glass you will note several scratches on your neck, which, as you have not yet shaved, are not caused by the razor. The assumption, therefore, is that thorns belonging to Miss Gladys attacked you in the night. *Voilà.*"

Lady Cynthia laughed merrily. "Then, having so marvelously solved the problem and discovered the criminal, the question remains, What is to be done to the owner of this pretty thing?"

"Something lingering with boiling oil in it," suggested Bannatyne.

"Would that do, Mr. Lock?" she asked.

He elevated his eyebrows in his customary gesture, thereby indicating that the conversation was too frivolous for him. He indorsed this also by deliberately sauntering away.

Bannatyne gazed after him. "I do wish I was as

old as that young man," he remarked; "then I should be completely responsible."

"Aren't you now?" she asked lightly.

He shook his head. "You know I'm not, Lady Cynthia. I go to sleep in church, and I all but snore. If you had only realized it, there was the man marked out from that hot Sunday onward—marked, branded as with iron. To go to sleep in church is to be dead to all sense of duty."

"I did once," she confessed.

"I don't know if once is sufficient," he pondered. "I hope so. I want you to belong to us."

"Do you think I'm so very serious, Mr. Bannatyne?" she asked.

He considered her. Her face was alight with youth and gayety. "No," he said, shaking his head. "I believe you're as bad as any of us, really. But you are a more skillful hypocrite. You're an impostor, I can see, and I really ought to expose you. *Are* you Allegra, or Penserosa? I thought I had it just now, but that flash in your eyes is deceiving. You are plausible, oh, so very plausible!—specious, even; but you are a humbug, I'll swear. Yes, I believe you are Allegra."

"Do you?" said Lady Cynthia in pretty merriment, and hid her face in her nosegay.

His eyes went to it. "Roses," he said. "There's only one rose I really love. Gladys gave it to me yesterday; and I have it still in my room."

"What's that?" she inquired.

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"La Gloire Lyonnaise," he replied, watching her.

Lady Cynthia nodded. "I know it. I've got one here, I believe," she said, fingering among her flowers. "No, I don't seem to have. It *is* beautiful."

"May I have one of these?" he asked.

"Failing your fancy, you may," she said gayly, and picked him out a beautiful Caroline Kuster.

He set it in his buttonhole, inhaled its fragrance, and remarked: "As it has to die, it may as well die here." He noticed she held the flowers against her breast. "No, it should die there, and die happily. What chances flowers have!"

She had taken on a slight warmth of coloring, and her face was partly turned from him. Out of peace and contentment fluttered trouble. Lady Cynthia was vaguely perturbed.

"What shall we do with this?" he went on after a pause, pointing to Gladys's sash. "Do you think we could tie her up in it?"

"I must talk to her seriously," said Lady Cynthia, who had recovered herself. "She mustn't worry that poor man. He's really awfully clever."

"I think I'll keep it as a keepsake," said Bannatyne, "a disturbing keepsake, to produce when Gladys is adult and serious. How she would be put to confusion by the memory! Out of the deeps of the past would I call up this nightmare."

"Oh, girls are not so easily disturbed," said she. "Gladys would only laugh, and say, 'Did I? Fancy! How naughty of me!'"

"I believe you're right," he agreed. "Then I will just keep it for old sake's sake. There are some people who collect photographs of ladies, men who collect gar—well, other things, and some slippers. Why shouldn't I collect sashes?" He paused. "I once had another keepsake, but I lost it," he said sadly.

"Another?" she asked politely.

"A shoe."

"A shoe!" repeated Lady Cynthia.

"Yes, but it is a sore subject. I oughtn't to have referred to it."

Lady Cynthia looked as if she would like to have asked him another question, but she did not. Instead, she glanced toward the entrance to the rosery, where a foot on the gravel path was audible. It was Miss Grant-Summers.

"Good morning," she called, seeing Bannatyne across the bushes. He lifted his hat and returned the salutation, but when Miss Grant-Summers turned into their path-way she saw Lady Cynthia for the first time.

"What lovely flowers!" she said, dividing a glance between the girl and her roses.

"They are best plucked in the early morning," said Lady Cynthia.

"Oh, that, of course, was why you're up so early," said Miss Grant-Summers, smiling. "It's quite intelligible, isn't it, Mr. Bannatyne? "But it doesn't explain *your* early rising," she added provocatively.

"I don't understand," said he, but Lady Cynthia looked away.

"I understand Lord Eastwood's coming this morning—isn't he, Lady Cynthia?"

At this the girl's face flushed quickly, and some expression flitted over it so swiftly as to be unintelligible to her companions. She moved slightly. "I believe so," she said coldly, but her pulse was jumping. Why could not that happy morning feeling have continued? Why was all her world suddenly disordered by this woman's words?

Miss Grant-Summers gazed at her with a satisfied smile, and then directed her attention to Bannatyne: "But that doesn't account for you," she said archly.

"I?" said he easily. "Oh, I'm easily accounted for. I got up to help Lady Cynthia."

CHAPTER XIV

HELENA

MISS LATHAM was overtaken in the park by Gladys, and a fox-terrier puppy, whose idea of life consisted of alternate excursions and alarms. When Gladys came up he was hanging on to her skirts by his very needlelike teeth, and growling with the ferocity of a mature tiger. Also, he seemed to think that it would be possible to shake Gladys, in whose frock there were already rents.

"Good gracious, Gladys, you'll be all in bits!" said Miss Latham in admonition; but Gladys shook her head.

"It's only an old dress, and he has to harden his teeth. Isn't he a duck?"

The puppy, deciding that, now Gladys had come to a pause, there was no more sport to be had of her, had turned his attention to Miss Latham, and was examining her with a bright and liquid eye. She held out her hand coaxingly, and, his tail wagging half his body in deprecation, he advanced and allowed himself to be fondled.

"He is pretty," said Miss Latham, and uttered a little scream as the needles met in her finger.

"Oh, he's always doing that!" said Gladys, coolly plucking him away. "He hasn't got his proper teeth

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yet." She held up her own hands, which were punctured with tiny marks. "I'm taking him to be taught ratting," she explained.

"Ratting!" echoed Miss Latham in astonishment.

"Yes; I know a man in the village who's promised to break him in. Come on, Rip!" She whistled as she made off, and the pup stood halting between two opinions, looking first at his old friend and then at his new. Finally he decided in favor of neither, and began lolloping awkwardly in quite another direction. Here he suddenly stopped, abandoning perforce whatever mission had been in his head at the sight of a formidable stranger. This was Bannatyne, who made some encouraging noises with his lips. The pup, dissatisfied with these, retired growling, and in an attempt to execute a particularly ferocious and contemptuous figure, rolled over into a hole and set up a yelp. Gladys darted forward and rescued him.

"Thank goodness," said Bannatyne, sighing with relief, as he saluted Miss Latham, "Gladys has come to my rescue! Beauty and the Beast! Gladys, I shall not feel safe if you don't carry that panther. Which way are you going? Oh, to the village! Well, you needn't go down the park, child. Come with us, by the glade, and you can go through the Wilderness. I haven't seen you for about a week."

"You've only been here two days," said Gladys frankly.

"Two days! Good heavens, it seems a lifetime! I've gone through so much happiness. When the lotus-eaters,

Miss Latham, arrived at the place where it always seemed afternoon, what could they reckon of time? It was made for slaves, not voluptuaries, like you and me—and Gladys."

Bannatyne had taken charge of the party as a matter of course, which Kitty Latham had come to realize as one of his traits. He had asked Gladys to accompany herself and him, taking it for granted that her way was his. Kitty submitted, and she even took pleasure in the submission. She had been going down to inspect the bathing pool, for the morning was growing steadily hotter, but she drifted away now with no destination, diverted from her errand.

"Oh, I'm not a voluptuary," she protested.

"What's a volup—whatever it is?" inquired Gladys.

"A person who always takes the shortest cut to his own pleasures," said Bannatyne, "a self-willed sensualist—you, for example, Gladys. By the bye, where are we going, Gladys? where are you taking us?"

"I'm not taking you anywhere," said the girl. "It's you, Mr. Bannatyne."

"So it is. I forgot. Well, let's go this way, and we can get upon the heath and let the wind blow dreams into us. The wind that comes over the mountain stirs in me madness. Would you like to be mad, Gladys? How is Mr. Lock?"

Gladys blushed a rose-red, but he did not wait for her answer; instead, he turned to Miss Latham:

"I don't want to see this blessed Lord Eastwood—do you? Everyone seems to be waiting for him."

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"No, I don't think so," she responded, smiling; "not very much."

"Peers are like pigs—they are bought in a poke," he continued reflectively; "no one thinks of asking questions about peers or pigs. This sack contains a genuine peer. How much? Then there is brisk bidding. No, I don't like peers or pigs—particularly educated pigs and educated peers; so let's get away."

They walked on for some moments in silence, and turned into a glade which was one of the bays of the Wilderness, and was deep in spreading bracken. A path of sward ran undulating through this toward a track that breached the wood above and ultimately communicated with the heath.

"Put down puppy, and see what becomes of him," said Bannatyne; but Gladys indignantly refused.

"He would be lost in the bracken, poor dear!" she said.

"I spy a fairy of the glade," said he abruptly. "Turn round three times, and guess who she is, Miss Kitty. Oh, Gladys, you've looked!"

"It's Miss Arden," said Gladys, paying him no heed.

"And she's—what is she doing?" he asked in wonder.

Toward the head of the glade stood the remains of an ancient cottage which had been converted into a shed; and into this Miss Arden suddenly bolted with precipitation, and every sign of alarm.

"What's up?" repeated Bannatyne, and then suddenly began to hasten. "It's cows," he called out. "Come along, Gladys; bring our protector with you."

He broke into a sharp run as he spoke, and Gladys went after him helter-skelter, her long black legs flashing under her skirt. Miss Latham also ran, but with less celerity. Bannatyne surmounted the bracken and came out upon the grass space above it where the shed stood. Two or three young bullocks were inquisitively moving about it, and one was standing in the open doorway.

Bannatyne's hand, as he passed, fell with a loud report on the flanks of the nearest, and all took to their heels. He arrived at the door a little out of breath.

"I claim the reward," he said. "I got here first. None of it belongs to Gladys, please. Alone I did it. By heaven! but 'twas a gallant struggle with yonder steer."

Miss Arden was somewhat pale, and her face lighted up on seeing and hearing him.

"I know I'm a coward," she confessed, "but I really cannot stand them. They came up so close and looked so awful, and——"

"Gladys doesn't want any of the reward," said he blandly; "she resigns in my favor. I forget what I saw advertised. Half your father's kingdom, I think, and—there was something else. Perhaps you remember. Of course," he added, "one can always turn up the papers."

Miss Arden had lost her pallor, but she gave vent to a little laugh, partly of amusement and partly of embarrassment. She emerged from the shed. "I don't think I'll try short cuts again. I was going to the heath."

"That's where we're all going," said he triumphantly.

Miss Latham had arrived panting, and Gladys was

flushed also. She set down the terrier-pup, who, after making three attempts to reach his tail, promptly discovered a horrid enemy in Miss Arden's sunshade and flew at it. This was rescued from him, and, after receiving an admonishing slap, he consented to proceed quietly toward the wood—that is, with a puppy's notion of quietness.

"I seem to be cut out for a hero," said Bannatyne complacently. "I saved you from a cow, and I saved Miss Latham from a bee. No, by the way, I didn't. It stung you, didn't it, Miss Kitty? Let me see."

He took her hand. "Better—almost well, I'm glad to see, Miss Arden, would you sooner look better than you are, or be better than you look?"

"I must think it over," she said lightly.

"Gladys, would you sooner look prettier than you are, or be prettier than you look?" he asked, turning to her confidentially.

Gladys pondered. "But I don't see, Mr. Bannatyne, how you *can* look prettier than you are. They're the same thing."

"Oh, no, they're not—are they, Miss Arden? They're quite different, aren't they, Miss Latham? I'd far sooner look prettier than I am. Wouldn't you, Miss Arden?"

"I'm sure I never thought of it," she returned.

"Think of it now," he begged.

"I'm afraid it's all nonsense," she rejoined. "You might as well ask if you would sooner talk sillier than you are, or be sillier than you talk."

"Let's change the conversation, please," said Bannatyne hurriedly. "Where's my reward?"

"What would you like?" asked Miss Arden indulgently.

The absurd pup was making a tempest of Miss Latham's skirts and worrying a fierce enemy. She shook him off, and centered her shy eyes on Bannatyne. He stood in apparent absorption of thought, while Miss Arden gently quizzed him with her gaze.

The puppy, repulsed by the enemy, pondered new fields of derring doe, and sheltered himself at Miss Arden's feet.

"That requires deep thinking," he said. "I thought you would remember that advertisement. Oyez! Oyez! to all and sundry: If anyone shall rescue the princess from the cow—I mean dragon, of course—I promise——"

Miss Arden turned with a smile on her lips and went forward. Unhappily the puppy was under her feet, and, her skirts impeding, she took two steps, tripped, and to the music of a canine yell, fell forward. Bannatyne put out his arms instinctively and caught her, and she lay in them for the fraction of a second.

"So many thanks," he said, lifting her to her feet. "I am content. I have had the reward. That squares things."

She raised a flushed face to him. "I don't pretend to know what you mean," she said, "but I am much obliged to you. It was that wretched puppy."

She ignored Miss Latham's presence, but it was pre-

cisely her ignoring it that showed her conscious of it. She spoke quite shortly.

"Gladys, dear," said Bannatyne, "your faithful canine friend is upsetting our tempers. I have now saved three people, only two of them's one."

"I'll take him to the village," said Gladys. "Pur-land's going to teach him ratting."

Bannatyne pulled out his watch hurriedly. "My dear Gladys," he said, "the ratting season will be over at precisely eleven o'clock. Fly!"

Gladys demurely laughed and picked up her dog. As she went she cast sidewise glances at Miss Arden and one at Bannatyne. Gladys had her instincts, though she did not wholly understand.

Miss Latham looked after her undecidedly as she went, but Bannatyne's glance dwelt on her in his friendly manner, and she made no attempt to break away. She followed him and Miss Arden up the slope that gave access to the glade beyond—*Titania's* Glade. Miss Arden went in silence, but Bannatyne judged it to be a not unsatisfied silence. She was civilly sweet to Miss Latham, but aloof. With the skirts of her dress in hand as they went through the patch of wood, she turned to speak to the younger woman, and her voice was equable, as cool as chastity. You would never have guessed that she had felt the other in the way and had been embarrassed. She did not communicate that fact to Bannatyne by any tokens. After all, if he had settled to ignore Kitty Latham's presence, she might be content to do so; there was a certain piquancy in the situation

which she had not made, but now began to appreciate. She was out of hand just sufficiently to yield to a stronger nature, that is, to the male of her kind. Mirabel Arden prided herself on her sexual indifference, but unconsciously she leaned now upon the man. She had the attitude to him, not of *Hermia* the bold, magnificently challenging with all the investiture of her sex, but of the helpmeet and consort, already under authority and content to be so. She felt the concession to a man's mastery quite pleasant; she was hardly conscious of her beauty. But as she looked at Kitty Latham, it came back to her with a thrill. She was better-looking than this pretty girl, who had nothing but prettiness. Miss Arden felt that there was more grace in the way she would stoop to pluck flowers, in the very way she swept about now, skirt in hand, than in Kitty Latham. There was distinction as she conceived it, and her glances in the interval flowed down her figure to the ground with quiet satisfaction.

"Miss Arden," suddenly said Bannatyne, who had been brooding, "do you like pigs?"

"Pigs!" she echoed. "Pigs! Do you mean bacon?"

"Oh, pigs, pigs for pets," he explained. "Miss Latham and I don't; that's why we've come away."

'There was a lady loved a swine;

"Honey," said she,

"I'll give thee a silver trough."

"Humph!" said he.'

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At least I think it was a pig; but it may have been a peer. I always do mix those two up, as the little girl said of the Suez and Regent's canals."

"Don't you like Lord Eastwood?" asked she, taking his point.

"I don't know him well enough to dislike him," he replied; "but I disapprove of him. I'm tired of peers. I'll advise Hancock to make him understudy to *Bottom*," he declared viciously; "that will pay him out."

"Pay him out?" said Miss Arden interrogatively.

"Yes. You see, he arrives to-day, and bang goes all our dream of happiness."

"But I don't understand, Mr. Bannatyne," said Miss Arden. "What has Lord Eastwood to do with your dream of happiness?"

"That's it — just nothing," he replied moodily. "What's he got to do with it? You put it admirably. Let him keep his fingers out of it."

"You are most enigmatic," she laughed.

"Well, a peer is a peer," he said, "or a pig. At any rate, the apparition of a peer is destructive of day-dreams; a peer appears and dissolves idle fancies. A peer is the only material and substantial thing in existence, except a banker. All peers ought to be bankers. Most bankers are, I fancy, peers. The fabric of the State would be secured by the trinity of peers, bankers, and brewers. In the presence of peers mere folk like myself walk, pale, ineffectual shadows. You can hardly hear our footfalls; we are permitted to exist only. We don't leave footprints on the sands of time, but a peer

does; his is a number nine square-toed shoe." He glanced at Miss Arden's foot as she walked. "A peer picks up all eyes, and we common fellows just cease. If you run up against a peer you hurt your elbow. It's no use kicking against the pricks."

"You bring an alarming charge of snobbery," criticised Miss Arden.

"Do you know some beast who said woman was seldom a prig, sometimes a cad, and always a snob?"

"I don't know him, but I'm sure he was a beast," said Miss Arden. "He's also incidentally an impostor."

"Yes, I suppose he is," said Bannatyne absently, as he looked about him. "Here we are at the Royal Sylvan Theater, stalls one pound—no pit, by request. Spectators are cautioned not to touch the fairies, who are delicate and may break. Beauty to suit all tastes, from dark to fair, from grave to gay. Let us have a rehearsal all to ourselves. What do you say, Miss Latham?"

"I thought we were going to the heath," said Miss Arden dryly.

"So we are," he assured her. "I know a beautiful brief way there. Now we shan't be long. Do let us rehearse, and—" He broke off, his eyes fixed on the middle distance where the glade rolled out into the park. "Good heavens, there's *Demetrius*!" he exclaimed. "Let us bolt!"

He made as if to hurry away, but Miss Arden did not move. "If Mr. Ferris comes, we might be able to rehearse better," she said coolly.

"I'm not going to wait for him. He spoils my fun

always," said Bannatyne, looking at her reproachfully. "I do wish you'd give me a turn. Come, let's bolt."

Miss Arden laughed, and indulged his humor. The three began to go quickly across the glade among the bracken.

"It's really too bad," protested Miss Arden. "I feel quite mean. Let's go back."

"No, no," he pleaded, "not yet. I've got something to show you!"

"I'm afraid he's seen us," said Miss Latham.

"Well, we haven't seen him," said Bannatyne. "We're in a great hurry to get to the heath to see the sunrise. May I give you a hand up, Miss Arden?"

They slipped into the fringe of the Wilderness as he spoke, and the form of Ferris was shut out from view by the occluding trees. They scrambled upon a path and came to a stop. They were all rather breathless, and looked at each other like conspirators.

"I feel dreadfully guilty," said Miss Arden.

"Oh, it's quite right," he told her. "It's all for the best. If we met, there'd be an awful scene—perhaps bloodshed. You know *Puck* has to keep us apart. When I think of Ferris my blood positively boils. I wish I—I have a good mind to go down now and have it out."

Miss Arden entered into the spirit of his mock-heroics. She put a detaining hand on his arm.

"Please don't," she pleaded.

"Well, for your sake I won't," he returned. "Let us make haste, or he'll overtake us."

They proceeded along one of the characteristic paths of the Wilderness, and presently came to a turning.

"I earnestly hope you and Miss Arden know your way about this awful place," said Bannatyne.

"I haven't the least idea," said Miss Arden.

"I don't think I know very well," said Miss Latham, "but I think we go this way."

"O blind leader of the blind, we'll all roll into the ditch presently," he prophesied, and stopped to gaze about him, as if something familiar had dawned on him.

"Yes," he said, answering his own unspoken query, "it is. The waterfall is here. It must be a little to the left, farther on. Have you seen the waterfall, Miss Arden?"

"Waterfall! I don't think I have," she returned doubtfully.

"Oh, it isn't Niagara," he said. "It isn't really a waterfall at all, in fact, only we like to call it so. It is a little trickle of water that comes over two rocks from a spring above, and flows bubbling for the Wellingbourne. You know it, Miss Latham?"

"Yes, I've seen it," said Kitty.

"Well, if it's one of the sights, let's go there," said Miss Arden gayly.

Bannatyne led the way, and they dipped into the tangled growth, the two girls walking carefully to avoid the brambles, and the various creepers that swarmed on the ground. Soon the noise of water could be heard, and there emerged presently from the gloom of the wood a face of rock with a spouting stream dashing down the sides.

"There!" said Bannatyne, with the air of a showman. The two girls halted by his side.

"What a pretty little cascade!" remarked the older.

"Isn't it sweet?" said the younger.

Bannatyne eyed them askance. He had not revisited the scene of his nocturnal adventure till now, but it came back on him with sudden force. It gained fresh zest, with the two girls contemplating the water with untroubled eyes.

"If you like," said he, "you can climb a little way up there, and get to the level of the pool from which the water descends."

Miss Arden began to move in the direction suggested, and Miss Latham followed. Bannatyne parted the bushes for them.

"How delightful!" exclaimed the one.

"Isn't it?" echoed the other.

"It would even be possible," pursued Bannatyne thoughtfully, "if one were very hot, on a day like this, to take off one's boots and socks, or shoes and stockings, as the case might be, and, seated by this grassy pool, to dabble one's feet in the cool cascade."

There was a momentary silence; then Miss Arden said: "You're not inviting us to do anything of the sort, I hope?"

"No," he said, "I was merely considering possibilities. Don't you think it would be nice, Miss Latham?"

"Charming!" said the girl, advancing to the verge of the rock and looking down. She seemed interested,

and a little hurried in her manner. Miss Arden was cool and composed. But women were all hypocrites, he reflected; they were never to be judged by the faces they presented. Miss Arden turned on him a face like an angel's for purity of coloring and repose. He had a sudden disposition toward annoyance, and began to talk rapidly:

"Do you know, I don't care for bathing with things on. If you can't bathe in 'the altogether,' what's the use of bathing? The only people who know how to bathe are the Thames mud larks and the South Sea Islanders. Wouldn't you like to ride the surf on a South Sea coast, Miss Arden?"

"Not very much," said Miss Arden.

"I mean, of course, without the absurdities of fashionable bathing dress," he said; "just as one dabbled pink legs in the sea in childhood's happy hours."

Miss Arden had a little color in her face, but Miss Latham was unchanged. She gazed at him with interest, as if she pondered this idea. She was as near to innocence as a grown woman might be.

"It might be very amusing," admitted Miss Arden; "but are we ever going to get to this heath?"

She made a movement downward, and he assisted her. If either of the two had been there before, they both concealed it admirably. But was Kitty Latham in her shyness guilty? or was it Mirabel Arden in her composure? That very composure might argue against the latter. Bannatyne had thought to find some trace of embarrassment in one of them which might betray her;

and now he conceived he had found it in Kitty Latham, he was inclined irrationally to decide in favor of Miss Arden. He recalled his old conclusion: all women are impostors. There was not a fleck or flaw that crossed Mirabel Arden's delicate beauty; yet she was as much a humbug as Miss Grant-Summers. He despaired.

But he had no time to indulge his despair, for when they reached the path Ferris joined them — Ferris, flushed and darkling of brow.

"I've been trying to get Miss Arden to sit under the waterfall," explained Bannatyne to him amiably.

Ferris ignored him, and addressed Miss Arden. "I thought it was arranged we should go through that scene this morning," he said in a note of reproachful respect. "I waited till eleven."

"I haven't any recollection of it," said she sweetly, unperturbed. "You must have confused me with some one else."

"How could I?"

There was fervor in his voice, intended for her ear and heart.

"Do you know, Ferris, if I were you I should shave my imperial," said Bannatyne, who had been eying him.

Ferris turned more emphatically to Miss Arden, thus presenting a back view to the others.

Bannatyne walked round to the front, and examined him anxiously.

"It won't do, you know," said he, shaking his head.

"I'm sure *Demetrius* never wore an imperial. What do you think, Miss Arden?"

"I? I have no opinion," she answered lightly. "I'm not an authority on costume."

"Hancock and I were talking it over this morning, and we both concluded you ought to shave," said Bannatyne mercilessly.

"My dear sir," said Ferris testily, "don't be absurd, if you can help it.—I'm sorry if the mistake was mine, Miss Arden," he added loftily, "but I thought it was distinctly understood."

"Of course, you could paint it out," mused Bannatyne. "Cover it up with a layer of grease."

Miss Latham began to titter appreciatively. Ferris turned red, and frowned, but as he was standing away from his tormentor the frown was discharged at Miss Arden. She was untouched by any feeling, even that of humor.

"I assure you there was no arrangement whatever," she said firmly. "I don't forget my appointments. And really, I think we get enough of rehearsal as it is."

Ferris made a movement impatiently, awkwardly, as if he would leave, but stood, his lip working.

"Try gin, Ferris," said Bannatyne soothingly. "Nothing like gin for disappointment. Try 'our best unsweetened,' and you will bury your mother-in-law with equanimity."

Ferris still made no reply, but, conquering himself by an effort, turned and addressed Miss Latham with an elaborate pretense of interest in the wood.

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"There are some defeats that are more glorious than victory," murmured Bannatyne to Miss Arden. "Ferris has my respect."

"He is very rude," she said coldly; "and persistent," she added deliberately.

They walked on, Ferris and Kitty Latham in front, and emerged on the heath a little later. Bannatyne chatted idly, and Miss Arden was serenely lovely. She dispersed charm as does the moon, a cool, soft charm that illumined her neighborhood. But did the blood of mere woman animate her body? He caught her smile. She was Diana. Oh, no; never was this his Dryad, never this creature of cold, passionless clay. He turned aside from the thought, and his eyes rested on Kitty Latham in the distance. Either might have done it, and neither might have done it. Probably, he thought desperately, it was Kathleen Merrington. It might as well be she as any other, Kathleen the correct and precise. It did not matter who it was. Really he told himself he had given up caring who it might be. But it certainly was not *Helena*.

CHAPTER XV

LORD EASTWOOD

LORD EASTWOOD was at lunch, and occupied much of his host's attention. He was invited to offer his opinion as to the date of the dissolution, and smilingly declined.

"We don't feel troubled; that's all I can say," said he. "Let the other fellows do the walking."

"I think I may safely say we have been doing that for some time," remarked Peter Bouverie, who was on the opposite side in politics. "We also do the talking."

"I've not heard you once this session, Bouverie," said the undersecretary in what Bannatyne felt was a patronizing manner. But Bouverie was imperturbable.

"That's because I haven't spoken," he explained. "And I haven't heard you, but that's not because you haven't spoken. It's because I have always been out of the House."

"I'm sorry I drive you forth," said Eastwood, laughing.

"You don't. You don't do anything to me. I simply don't acknowledge your existence. I believe you're a sort of Minister, aren't you? I've heard people say so in the House. And where do you live? In the Clock Tower? I'm quite pleased to have this opportunity of

meeting you, Eastwood, but you mustn't let your natural excitement at the pleasure interfere with your lunch."

He waved his hand toward the undersecretary's plate, and that important person, with a recognizing laugh, fell to; he also engaged in a serious political conversation with Sir Edward Coombe.

"I dislike a man who carries shop into the dining room," observed Bannatyne to Miss Ashcroft. "No one should talk shop save in the shop."

"That would seem to seal the lips of politicians outside Parliament," she replied thoughtfully.

"An excellent idea," he said furtively.

Miss Ashcroft considered him. "What do you do?" she asked bluntly.

"I'm a matrimonial agent, and hence the only thing I may not speak of is marriage," he said gravely.

Miss Ashcroft's face did not change. She appeared to turn this remark over, as she appeared to turn over so many remarks.

"Does that condemn you to celibacy?" she asked. "I suppose you can get married in office hours."

"There are no office hours," he said gloomily.

"Then that settles it," she replied.

"It settles me," he remarked with his faint smile. "Of course, I shall die as I have lived—a bachelor."

"Have you sown your wild oats?" she asked him.

"Oh, dear, yes, long ago," he told her. "Quite a long time ago."

"How many?"

"Bushels."

"And what reaped you therefrom?" asked Miss Ashcroft.

He paused. "I don't think I've reaped, so far. The harvest is not yet. But it probably won't be oats; it will be tares or trets."

"You should insure," she advised.

"Insure?" He looked at her.

"Yes; marriage," she nodded at him.

"I've told you I can't discuss the subject," he said hastily.

"No; but I can."

"Do, if you will. I like to hear you. Your voice is soothing, if your sentiments are upsetting."

"Look at Lord Eastwood now. He's handsome enough."

"I know what he's doing. He's explaining to Sir Edward how he had to speak three hours on the Army Bill. I've heard him explain it before. I'm glad I didn't hear his speech. He always looks handsomer when he explains it; he's living at his highest and fullest then."

"You don't like him?" inquired Miss Ashcroft.

"I don't like the way he parts his hair," he said, frowning.

Miss Ashcroft stared at him a moment, and then addressed her other neighbor. Bannatyne turned to his, who was Kathleen Merrington, and engaged her in a lively talk. In point of fact he was not feeling very lively, but the habit of a life is easily assumed.

After lunch he joined a group on the terrace who were discussing midges.

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"I believe bathing the body carefully and thoroughly in paraffin is a sure preventive," said Bouverie.

Lady Coombe uttered a little scream. "Good gracious! Horrible idea!" she declared.

"Camphor bags round the bottom of your trousers is a pretty safe thing," said Captain Madgwick.

"Oh, but we haven't all got—" began Lady Merrington, and her daughter twitched at her arm. "What is it, my dear?"

Miss Kathleen was rosy red. Bannatyne turned his head away quickly, and encountered Mrs. Everard Battye with a suppressed smile.

"Have you ever tried—" he began, but she interposed hastily.

"Oh, I never try any specifics. I grin and bear it," she said.

"You, Lady Cynthia?" he asked; but Lady Cynthia had moved off with gentle decision. He looked after her. He thought she had deliberately avoided him, and then he noticed Sir Edward issuing from the door with Lord Eastwood. Was that the explanation? He saw them meet, and the three exchanged conversation, Sir Edward ponderous and genial, Eastwood gallant and ceremonious. He turned his back on the sight, and walked away.

"Mr. Bannatyne!" called a voice, and he halted. It was Lady Fallowfield. She approached resolutely, with her clear eyes so like Cynthia's, but harder. "You haven't spoken to me since yesterday," she said gayly.

"One waits for queens to speak," he said.

"That's very nice of you. You're always very nice; also you're a humbug. You never deceive me, but I dare say you do most of these girls."

She swept a glance about the terraces.

"You find me singularly alone," he replied. "I am more or less ostracized."

"Only bored, my friend," said the lady. "I know you, you see. You have a blue mood. Well, I can put up with it, for I'm particularly cheerful to-day."

"No wonder," he replied, with a vague wave of his hand toward the people.

"You think you know?" she asked frankly.

"I have heard rumors. I have a guess," he said.

"You mean—" Their eyes met. She walked on with him.

"You are so old a friend that I won't keep it from you. Yes, there are rumors. Of course, nothing is definite. But you can see how it is." Her glance lingered on her daughter in the distance, who was talking to Lord Eastwood. Sir Edward had left them.

"Will my congratulations be premature?" he asked civilly.

"Half on account, I think," she said with a smile, and added, "He's certain of cabinet rank in time."

"To judge from what I know of him and of cabinets, absolutely certain," he said.

"You don't know him well?" she queried.

"I judge him by his performances. That three hours' speech, now!"

"Yes," said Lady Fallowfield delightedly. "That

helped him a lot; but he's going farther, and he's young—not quite forty."

"Dear me, that makes me feel juvenile!" said Bannatyne; "and you too, Lady Fallowfield."

"Nonsense!" said she cheerfully. "Look at Cynthia."

"Lady Cynthia must be—" He hesitated.

"Twenty-two," said her mother.

"Old enough to be grown up, I suppose," he remarked.

"Girls," said Lady Fallowfield sententiously, "are more grown up than boys."

"Are they?" he questioned. "They qualify, so to speak, but do they know it? Do they realize it? Is a girl of twenty or a boy of twenty the better judge of destiny?"

"The girl," said the countess promptly.

"I doubt it," said he, shaking his head. "Girls don't know anything about machinery."

"What's machinery got to do with it?" inquired his companion bluntly.

"Well, we're very complicated machinery, aren't we? We're engines of a sort. I'll lay stakes on maiden ignorance."

"We mustn't talk about such things," said the countess.

"Why exclude what is most interesting? Most things in life hinge on what you forbid. I always took you for a courageous woman," he told her.

"I am," she answered. "I don't mind. You can go

on talking, if it amuses you; but, frankly, it bores me. I got over my interest in it a good many years ago. It belongs to youth."

"On the contrary, it belongs to middle age, for I have it."

She laughed. "Oh, you won't have to face it. It will be faced for you when the time comes. Men have an excellent time. They've no problems—merely sensations."

"You've no problems," he said, looking at her.

"Haven't I?" she laughed shortly. "Hadn't I, I mean? Thank goodness, they're solved, or——"

"Or?" he said encouragingly.

"Or given up in despair. There are no solutions to some."

He was looking at her thoughtfully. "Would you have everyone give up in despair?" he asked at last.

"Every healthy woman does," she retorted. "One can't go through life being morbid." Her direct eyes were on him as if she defied him and his logic.

He nodded. "That way lies madness, you think. But does it? You've never explored, Lady Fallowfield. You've turned aside. What's it like that way? Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Not in the remotest," she said, a faint color in her clear face.

"I wonder." He paused. "I don't believe women ever learn about machinery," he added.

"It's far too late," said she in her old decisive voice. "There's life to live, and the world to be met, and

daughters to be married, and the whole round to go through."

"It's a silly round," he said.

"Where's the alternative?" she asked.

"Didn't you turn your back on it?"

"How do you know?" she said sharply. "Who told you?"

"You," he answered softly. She shook her head. "Your face."

"Does that tell tales *now*?" she asked bitterly, and she was staring across the flowers at the park with eyes that did not seem to take in the scene. "I am a practical and a sensible woman," she resumed. "I know the plain value of facts and the measure of emotions. So when I do my sums I get my accounts square."

"And you're doing Cynthia's?" he suggested.

Her gaze came back to him sharply. "Yes," she said abruptly. "It will save her trouble. Mine were done for me."

"And the ledger is satisfactory?" he asked gently.

"Can't you see?" said Lady Fallowfield decidedly. "I can't very well sound my own trumpet, but I suppose you have eyes."

"I know I am walking with a very charming and perverse woman," he said, "but I can see nothing more."

"You are, I fancy sometimes, Mr. Bannatyne, a blind sentimentalist."

"Oh, I'm always on the side of the angels," he admitted, "but I am backed by logic."

"I know nothing about logic. Common sense is

good enough for me," she retorted. She turned as if to go.

"Well," he said quite gravely, "I hope the accounts will come out all right; but I don't think you're a good accountant. No woman is good at figures."

She laughed easily. "I thought I had preserved mine pretty well," she said. Don't turn yourself into a melancholy Jacques. No argument's worth it. Good-by."

She nodded pleasantly, and swept with her fine carriage across the lawn, the very picture of a *grande dame*. But Bannatyne stood watching her, and his face was still serious. They had fenced about a great question, and he was more than half convinced that Lady Fallowfield knew she was wrong; but that decisive mind would never admit it. She would issue her orders like a general in the field, and die in the results of the blunder. He went about, and paced along the garden, sunk in meditation.

Unconsciously he was walking toward the rosery, and in the distance, turning a corner in the pathway, he discovered Lord Eastwood and Lady Cynthia. The hot sun streamed upon the garden, and her white form flashed in the eye of it. Lord Eastwood's head was bent a little, as if in earnest talk. He could see them quite plainly as they emerged upon an open piece of sward, Lady Cynthia's large hat tilted slightly, and part of her face showing under it, as she listened in grave attention.

Bannatyne increased his pace, and some bushes shut

them from his view. He took a short cut across the grass toward the rosery. Near the entrance, to his surprise, he came upon Lady Cynthia alone. He had not expected to find her going that way, and he had expected to find her with Eastwood. He commented on the weather with none of his customary sprightliness, and she agreed in a perfunctory manner.

"It is likely to hold for to-morrow's performance," he remarked, and, looking up in the sky, she said it was.

"I wonder how the dress rehearsal will go this evening," he said after a pause.

"I hope it will go well," said Lady Cynthia

He inquired after her dress, and some animation appeared in her manner. "It's very pretty, I think. We've had them in plain self-colors, a different color for each of the fairies," said she. "Mine is pale blue with a lavender slip. And then, of course, you know, we have those absurd wings," she concluded with a little laugh.

"It will look seraphic under the moon," said Banatyne. "I'm glad I'm to be there. The rehearsal will really be better than the performance, for the moon will add to the romance, and to-morrow we shall be only in evening twilight."

"Do you think it will?" asked Lady Cynthia.

"Don't you think moonlight more romantic than twilight?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said doubtfully. "It's more showy, certainly. But hasn't the gloaming traditionally more claims?"

"So has moonlight. It's all that word, 'gloaming.' It's unfair. Poets have used it because it sounds nice. Gloaming ends in darkness, moonlight in dawn."

"I think that proves you in the wrong," said she.

"You mean romance dwells in darkness rather than in light. Perhaps you're right. I don't know. What is romance, if it comes to that? What is life? What is death? One simply gives up before the big questions; one capitulates. First principles would be convincing if you could get at them; but you can't. I know what is romantic in the concrete, but I should not like to define romance. Give her wings; let her soar; let her possess the waste spaces of the universe. If we catch the gleam of her skirts, let us be happy and ask no more." He stopped suddenly. "Lady Cynthia," he said, "once you plucked a rose for me; will you be so good as to pluck me another?"

"I never plucked one for you," she said, smiling. "You're mixing me up with some of the many people who pluck roses for you."

"Well, you gave me one," he said. "I have it still. It lives on whisky and water. It's a regular toper. But it's dying alone; it wants companionship."

"There are plenty of lovely companions for it," she said, pointing to the bushes.

He looked at her, but she was looking elsewhere, and after a pause he moved forward and fingered the leaves of a rosebush.

"What rose is this?" he asked, as he held up a long white bud just breaking outward into full flower.

"Niphetos," said Lady Cynthia.

He set it in his buttonhole and plunged his hand again into the bush. Pulling it forth again, with a second bloom, he lifted it to his face.

"No thorns go as deep as the rose's," he quoted, as a stain of red blood emerged. "Will you have this one, Lady Cynthia?"

"Thank you," she said, taking it from him. She placed it at her breast, and went gently forward. Bannatyne joined her. Somehow the conversation was listless. They emerged from the rosery, wearing each a Niphetos rose, and on nearing the house Bannatyne descried Eastwood talking with Lady Fallowfield. His companion seemed disposed to enter the house by the western terrace, but something moved him, and he walked straight on, holding her in conversation. The result was that they passed close by Lady Fallowfield and the undersecretary. The countess's gaze rested on them casually, and perhaps a little interrogatively; she parted her lips.

"You do know Lord Eastwood, Mr. Bannatyne," she called.

Bannatyne stopped. "I have that satisfaction," he said, and held out a hand. "How d'ye do, Lord Eastwood. Just from town? Is the Government still in? Let me see: you're something in it, aren't you?"

Lord Eastwood stared; Lady Fallowfield smiled amusedly; but her daughter's face was free of any expression, though slightly flushed.

"The Government's in no danger," said the under-

secretary complacently. "The Opposition have no leader. Charming country," he remarked to Lady Fallowfield.

He had a hard, capable, and unimaginative face, and there were in the mass of his jaw tenacity and obstinacy; obviously he was a self-reliant and self-assured man. Clearly he would, in Lady Fallowfield's phrase, "go far." His glance went deliberately round the environing hills with a certain cool patronage; he "passed" the scenery. Bannatyne was irritated.

"Well, I'm afraid we must be getting on, Lady Cynthia," he said to the girl cheerfully. "Hope you'll enjoy your holiday, Lord Eastwood. It must be a relief not to be speaking."

He nodded, and took off his hat brazenly to Lady Fallowfield, whose eyes twinkled at him. Eastwood stared, and then his eyes were arrested by the Niphetos roses. He glanced from one to the other, and then turned a shoulder to them, and began to talk to Lady Fallowfield. To Bannatyne's surprise, Lady Cynthia walked on with him, which he had not expected in answer to his piece of bluff. She went passively by his side.

"I believe he's Prime Minister, or something of that sort," remarked Bannatyne indifferently to her, but he would have liked to hear what Eastwood was saying to the countess; and he knew he was getting a reputation from her as a chartered libertine. Somehow this idea did not please him. Lady Fallowfield's smile had indulged him; he knew that, and he felt angry. He

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glanced askance at her daughter, who was silent and passive.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to go up on the downs this afternoon?" he asked diffidently.

"An excellent idea," she replied.

"Then will you—" he began, and was interrupted.

"Oh, thanks, very much; I've got something else to do. But there are plenty of others who would be glad."

"I suppose there are," he mused, as they stopped at the entrance to the house. "Well, I'll lay the highly original idea before them."

His ear caught by a noise of laughter in the distance, he shot a glance round. A buttress intervening shut off the sight, but it was merry laughter. Lady Cynthia nodded at him in a friendly way, so very like her mother, and was gone. Bannatyne turned away sharply; he experienced at once mortification and pain. He loathed Lord Eastwood. Shouts came from round the corner. He turned it, and Chloe Merrington ran into his arms.

CHAPTER XVI

LOVE IN IDLENESS

CHLOE extricated herself with an embarrassed laugh. She was pink and pretty, and her hair was in divine disorder.

"Oh, Mr. Bannatyne," she panted, "we're playing such an amusing game! We're throwing cherries into Mr. Bouverie's mouth, and I'm just going back for more."

Bannatyne shook his head. "Is this, I ask you, Miss Chloe, is this the way to spend a summer afternoon? How many pounds of cherries has Bouverie swallowed?"

"Oh, but he doesn't catch them all," explained Chloe. "Sometimes he misses, and they hit him on the nose or somewhere," she giggled. "But he's pretty good at it," she confessed.

"It's all right, Miss Merrington," called out Gay's voice. "I have some," and his round red face emerged from behind some bushes. Bannatyne followed them. On a piece of lawn stood the Hon. Peter Bouverie, M.P., anxiously watching the flight of a cherry as it dropped toward him. There was a dodge, a snap of the teeth, and—plop!—it had fallen into the trap.

"Mine, now—oh, do catch mine, Mr. Bouverie!" cried a girl in excitement. She rushed forward, as if

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she were bowling at a wicket, with a rustle of her skirts, and propelled her cherry wildly in the air. It struck Bouverie on the chin, and he rubbed it.

"That's a yorker," he said. "I'm not sure it isn't a full pitch, Miss Bellenden. Please, don't bowl round the wicket. It puts me out. Now, then, Miss Merrington."

Kathleen Merrington delicately made her throw, and had the satisfaction of seeing Bouverie's jaws snap over it. Bannatyne advanced.

"No, I will not," said Bouverie, seeing him. "This is a professional, and I object. I'm only playing amateurs."

"How are you feeling?" inquired Bannatyne anxiously.

"I feel as if I had had too much dessert," said Bouverie. "I propose some one else takes my place. You, Bannatyne."

"Indeed, no," he replied indignantly. "I have more self-respect. I'm ashamed of you, at your age."

"What is my age?" asked Bouverie calmly, rejoining them.

"Oh, about seventy, I should say," said Bannatyne rudely.

Bouverie turned solemnly to the group. "Young ladies, I appeal to you. He says I'm seventy, in that brutal, vicious manner of his with which you are no doubt all familiar. I will not deny that I'm feeling considerably older than I was ten minutes ago, when we started this very interesting game; but seventy!"

"Gladys," said Bannatyne reproachfully, as she came up, "I believe you started this game!"

"Indeed I didn't, Mr. Bannatyne," she pleaded eagerly. "It was Mr. Bouverie himself. He said it was much better than cherry bob, and they'd be sorry when they heard of it in the House, and he hoped they'd bury him in Westminster Abbey."

"It isn't at all difficult, as a matter of fact," Gay assured the girls in his precisest voice, as Bouverie walked away to more adult company. "In fact it's rather easy. If you watch the descent of the cherry carefully, and open your mouth at the right time, nicely calculated, you are generally sure of your catch. Now, just you try, Miss Bellenden."

"No, thank you," said that young lady decidedly.

Gay looked round him. "Miss Merrington," he said.

Kathleen shook her head prettily. His gaze wandered on, and rested on Chloe. She looked doubtful, a reckless smile on her face, and glanced at Bannatyne as if for advice.

"Do," he said under his breath. "I'll bowl to you."

Chloe Merrington went forward lightly, and retired some distance. "Is this far enough?" she called.

"It will do for a start," Bannatyne replied. "Now, I'll send down slows. Give me that plate, Gay. Ready!"

The first cherry fell wide of the girl, though she made a frantic dash toward it; the second fell on her shoulder; the third hit her sharply on the forehead and wrested a tiny exclamation from her. The curves of her

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young throat and the lines of her young body were conspicuous as she moved lithely hither and thither. Bannatyne stopped throwing.

"You are too eager," he said.

"You don't watch the cherry," said Gay. "I'll show you what I mean."

Chloe came toward them, smiling, red from her exertions. She looked charming.

Gay took her place, and stood, his fat face thrown well back on a fat neck, his eyeglass in his eye, directed heavenward. Bannatyne tossed a cherry into the air. It descended on Gay's upper lip.

"Ah, that was an error; I wasn't quite ready," he murmured.

Bannatyne threw again, and Gay, stepping backward to catch, lost his hat and toppled over it, coming to a collapse on the lawn. The girls tittered. He struggled up ruefully.

"Another?" said Bannatyne gravely.

"Please," said poor Gay, desperate to restore his prestige.

Another hurtled through the air, and dropped like a rocket stick plump between his eyes. It was a rich blackheart, and it had been overripe; so that, meeting with that impact, it split, spread, and scattered. Gay's face was bespattered with the blood-red stains, and a patch covered one eye, the eye that held the eyeglass. Chloe Merrington went off into a helpless peal of laughter; Kathleen turned away, and Miss Bellenden held her handkerchief to her face.

"I'm awfully sorry, my dear Gay," said Bannatyne. "The whitehearts seem all gone."

The young man was engaged in a process of cleansing his face, with his back to the spectators, and he was understood to say something under his breath which was unintelligible at the distance.

"The best service we can render him is to leave him," said Bannatyne to the girls. "He will appreciate that kindness."

Smilingly they followed him into another part of the garden, leaving Gay to a wretched retrospect. The three girls—for Gladys had disappeared—trooped after him in gay spirits; they had the effect of brightness, of prettiness, and of irresponsibility. Kathleen smiled at Miss Bellenden, and Miss Bellenden smiled at Chloe, and Chloe smiled back and at him. He understood that Miss Bellenden was another fairy. Lady Coombe had certainly secured some delightful fairies. Her name emerged and was bandied about. It was Agatha. Bannatyne, in his tour of the grounds, followed by three chatterers, found himself disposed to call them by their appropriate names without the formality of polite address. It seemed ridiculous that Chloe should be Miss anything, and Kathleen should surely be only Kathleen. Agatha was willful and spirited, and why was she to be Miss Bellenden? However, conventions still hedged him in, and he made no effort to break them. As they laughed and talked nonsense his thoughts went back to Lady Cynthia, and grew a little bitter. With bitterness his recklessness increased. Chloe, he knew, was at his

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disposal; her frank and innocent admiration told him that; and he thought the pretty Miss Bellenden had a little of the sprite in her.

"I will tell you a secret," he said in a mysterious voice, "now that we're safe out here with no audience." The girls' chatter ceased. They were all attention.

"Have any of you ever been on the downs?"

Oh, yes; Chloe Merrington had been, and Miss Bellenden also.

"Well, those greensand hills range for several miles, over a pretty country full of forest and heath. So much you know, children. But have you ever heard of a part of the woodland known as Somerslease?"

Chloe thought she had; the others had not.

"And has any whisper come to you," he pursued, holding their eyes with a significant finger, "of a certain spring or well up there which dates back a thousand years or more, and owns wonderful properties?"

"No!" they all cried frankly and breathlessly.

"It's properties," said Bannatyne, sinking his voice, "include one remarkable power: the power of beautification. Some authorities have been of opinion that there is a mistake, and that the word should really be read 'beatification.' Scholiasts have written *putide* in contemptuous footnotes, and a fierce fight rages about the 'u' even to this day. However, I need not go into that. It is sufficient to say that the water of the well, in its solitary setting amid profound woods and silences, has the reputation of rendering either happy or handsome any who laves therein."

"Really?" cried Miss Bellenden with interest.

Chloe gazed, lips parted in frank excitement. Kathleen was gently solicitous. Bannatyne looked from one to another.

"It is quite absurd," he went on in an apologetic voice, "for me to have introduced this subject in this company. I was going to propose that we should all pay the well a visit, but"—he spread out his hands in deprecation—"I apologize, I ask pardon. I will go elsewhere. Mind you, it was only for *myself* that I desired the visit. I will not insult the three Graces by suggesting——"

"Oh, but we want to go!" cried Miss Bellenden.

"Do take us, Mr. Bannatyne," pleaded Chloe.

He gazed at them slyly. "It is possible, of course, that you may not all be quite *happy*," he said. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness. And if we assume that the scholiasts who favor the word 'a' are in the right, a visit might possibly be justified. But on no other assumption will I take you. I hope that is clearly understood?" he asked seriously.

Three faces were flushed, and exchanged glances. "Oh, yes," three voices chorused.

"Then let us proceed to steal one of Sir Edward's motor cars," said Bannatyne, turning on his heel.

They followed, Chloe, alas! reckless of the fact that she had promised to go trout-fishing in the Wellingbourne with Walrond, and Miss Bellenden oblivious of her engagement to walk with Atherton and his party. A small Panhard was available and quickly in readi-

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ness, and into it the girls crowded. There was no room for the chauffeur, who resigned his place to Bannatyne indifferently; and within a quarter of an hour they were off, a reckless, merry, giggling party.

A rush of wind met them in the road, tempering the great heat, and pleasure grew and sparkled in the faces of the young girls. They were near of an age. Chloe was eighteen, Kathleen twenty, and Miss Bellenden, according to Bannatyne's guess, might be twenty-one. He felt paternally fraternal, and sprang from nonsense to nonsense. It was Chloe who sat beside him, Chloe almost with an air of possession, Chloe hanging on his words and laughing like a child. She turned a demure face of smiling satisfaction round to her companions behind from time to time. They leaned forward, so as not to miss the conversation. Bannatyne drove briskly and talked briskly. There could be no doubt that they were enjoying it.

The car turned from the highway, and, altering its speed, began to talk as it slid up the hill; meadows gave place to abrupt woodland; the blue-green of the pines rose up in the distance; the scent of the pines was in their nostrils. The car kicked, all but stopped, and, feeling its power now, sped upward, with the wild forest upon either hand. The firs went by like flashes; the undergrowth of whortleberry was a blur of green; the Panhard hummed like a hive. The road wound round the crest of the hill.

When Bannatyne brought up before the inn door of the tiny village among heath and pine on the shoulder

of the hill, he looked down on three excited faces. Leaving the car in charge of the innkeeper, he led the way down a decline in those petty Alps and struck into a rough track 'twixt wood and field. Twenty minutes' walking brought them to a falling valley, silent and opaque under the summer sun. It was clothed about with woods and grown with bracken, and halfway down it a narrow path led amid brier and bramble and fern to the well.

The water issued from a little spring, and filled a square and ancient tank of brickwork, whence it dribbled again among the rank undergrowth, and flowed down into a rivulet in the valley. The pool in the tank was clear and cool to the eye.

"This is Mag's Well, ladies, as it has existed from the Christian era, at least, if not longer. It will cure colds, coughs, influenza, headache, pains in the—that is, heartburn, erysipelas, typhoid fever, and heartache; but most particularly heartache."

Miss Bellenden laughed. "But why most particularly heartache?" she inquired boldly.

"Having bathed in the waters," said Bannatyne solemnly, "a young man or a young woman becomes irresistible by reason of the increase of his or her beauty." He looked at all three apprehensively. "But please, don't any of you bathe in it," he begged.

Miss Bellenden took a step nearer, as if with intention.

"I shall simply take the next train to town," he declared decidedly.

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Miss Bellenden laughed; she threatened him thus playfully, and Chloe joined her to look down into the water.

"Miss Chloe, you really mustn't!" he supplicated. "It's bad enough as it is; but it's terrible to think what will happen if you should fall in. The only way I can think of preventing a dreadful calamity," he went on, plumping himself down on the grass, "is for me to sit here indefinitely. Then you can't bathe."

Miss Bellenden glanced at him with eyes hatching mischief. "Is the power of the water confined to the parts touched?" she asked.

Bannatyne nodded: "Absolutely."

She turned to Chloe. "Then I think it would be enough if we washed our hands and faces," she suggested.

"You don't need it—you really don't need it!" cried Bannatyne in mock alarm.

They smiled joyfully.

"They're quite clean," he added reassuringly.

Kathleen Merrington broke out into an amused laugh.

Chloe was looking interestedly at the pool, and now she stooped and ran her hands through the cool water.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" she called out.

"I can quite see that this valley is going to be turned into a tragic grove of classic times," said Bannatyne warningly. "Well, I have remonstrated. Your blood is on your own heads. Have you never heard of the fate of Daphne?"

"What happened to her?" inquired Chloe, looking up from where she dabbled her hands.

"She was turned into a laurel, because of her beauty," he said.

"But why was she turned into a laurel?" asked Chloe, puzzled.

"She begged to be."

"Why?" persisted the girl, still puzzled.

Miss Bellenden stood looking appreciatively at him, a smile on her lips. Miss Bellenden had read classical mythology.

"To escape," he explained. It was being wrung from him fragment by fragment.

"What?" asked Chloe.

He met Miss Bellenden's smiling and intelligent glance and took refuge there hurriedly. "Ask Miss Bellenden."

"She had too ardent an admirer," said Miss Bellenden.

Bannatyne nodded. "So, beware, Miss Chloe."

The full meaning of the comparison dawned slowly and with force on Chloe; she blushed as she dabbled her hands, and then, with a little flutter of excitement at her heart, she lifted wet fingers to her pretty face. Bannatyne saw, and made a feint of covering his face with his hands. He groaned. Mischief seized on the three. They all bent, and, kneeling by the tank, scooped water in the palms of their hands and bathed their faces, Miss Bellenden with laughter, Miss Merrington with silent playfulness. Bannatyne hid his head, and peeped

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with pretended bashfulness through his fingers at the pretty sight.

Three maidens, robed in soft summer dresses, knelt under the tender green of the embowering undergrowth and were bowed over the translucent water, as if they had been princesses in a fairy tale. He pulled his hand from his face.

"It's no good," he said desperately. "The mischief's done. I may as well get what good I can now by feasting on the beauty. Oh, beatified beauty!"

Chloe rose smiling; Kathleen rose; Miss Bellenden rose.

"You may as well complete the charm now," said Bannatyne. "I'll go away and leave you."

"Oh, no; we're quite satisfied," Miss Bellenden assured him. "It's had all the effect we want."

He inspected her, and she moved uneasily. "Yes, I I should think it had," he said meaningly. "Indeed, I should hope so."

Miss Bellenden blushed, and he turned his gaze to Kathleen.

"I should think you were content too, Miss Mer-rington," he said.

Kathleen blushed.

"Oh, Miss Chloe!" he shook his head reproachfully.

Miss Chloe blushed.

"May I walk between you?" he asked. "Oh, no, I can't, between three. How can we manage? May I take one at a time? The only difficulty is to know whom to begin with. It's a terrible situation. Why did I

ever bring you here? Fool that I was! I ought to have left well enough alone, and remained single-hearted and happy, without a thought of these horrid problems. Love, Miss Bellenden, is a gnawing misery—a canker—a disease. You'll find it out some day, and then you'll be sorry for your heartless conduct to-day. And when three gnawing miseries are on at the same time——”

They were walking up the valley toward the village, and now he stopped. “I never thought of it,” he said, and hit himself. “I could have washed myself and become irresistible. I'll go back and——”

“Oh, please, please don't, Mr. Bannatyne!” pleaded Chloe in tones of distress, fun and gladness sparkling in her eyes.

“Be merciful!” implored Miss Bellenden.

“No; it wouldn't solve the problem,” said he, resuming his walk, as if he had not heard these appeals. “It wouldn't tell me—*which*. It might only add to my embarrassments. What I want is *Oberon's Love-in-Idleness*.” He inspected the smiling faces, heaved a heavy sigh, and quickened his pace.

At the inn he stopped. “Goddesses don't eat, but they sometimes drink lemonade—I mean nectar. Will any goddess sip nectar?”

The goddesses shook their heads.

“Of course, I could ‘do a bolt’ in the motor,” he said thoughtfully. “But I must resign myself to fate. It is fate—it is destiny. Kismet! All aboard, your graces!”

Chattering, they took their seats, and the Panhard, slipping its moorings, whizzed down the white road

ecstatically. Miss Chloe had to hold her hat on; Miss Bellenden's voice tossed on the wind. A great air rolled up from the weald and streamed cool on the heights of the down. The furze pods cracked in the hot sun, but the wind of heaven inwrapped the voyagers in their flying car.

"I have been trying to make out which of you is which," shouted Bannatyne over his shoulder; for he had been silent for ten minutes, while he steered the Panhard. "Which is Aphrodite?"

The two girls behind looked at each other with suppressed laughter, and said nothing.

"Which is Hera? And which is Pallas Athene?" he went on.

"If I only knew which was which I could make up my mind, I think. I have my ideas, but I don't like to broach them, in case they're wrong. I think I know which is Aphrodite, the goddess of love."

His glance passed from Miss Bellenden to Miss Merrington, and from Kathleen to her sister, but it revealed nothing, only gravity of demeanor; then it swung off to the road ahead, and he was taken up with his duties.

The girls talked together; they were enjoying the end of the expedition as fully as they had enjoyed the outset. It had been perfect.

Chloe, turning, indicated a little bottle in her coat pocket. Kathleen stared in interrogation.

"It's water from the well," whispered back Chloe. "I filled it when no one was looking."

Miss Bellenden's eyebrows went up inquiringly.

"Don't you think," said Chloe naïvely, "don't you think—perhaps there is something in it—such an old well——"

Miss Bellenden laughed aloud. Chloe faltered. Banatyne turned round.

"Won't you tell me which is which?" he said, his thoughts resuming the subject. The car was running of its own weight down the steep slope into the valley. The lanes were embowered; the nut and the bramble almost met and interweaved overhead. A turn of the road, and lo! of a sudden the backbone of the chalk downs to the north, and the high-perched Pilgrim chapel in the eye of the sun.

"We don't know," said Miss Bellenden. "I don't think I'm Pallas Athene; I'm not feeling very wise to-day."

"Then are you—" He stopped. Miss Bellenden blushed once more. She did not shake her head. "*Patuit dea*," he murmured. Hera was ox-eyed. Who is ox-eyed?" He left them the problem, while his attention was again engaged by the machine.

They regarded one another. Miss Bellenden's eyes were large, and full of light. Was that what Homer had intended to signify by *Βούπις*? The problem remained. It was not settled when he faced them again, as they ran out upon the highroad.

"Of course, I could tell if I had half a chance. *Patuit dea*. But that is denied me."

"How could you tell?" asked Miss Bellenden challengingly.

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"I'm not going to tell," he declared. "Only I may remark that Paris's problem was comparatively easy; mine is hard. *Patuit dea*. I give it up."

He looked quizzingly at Chloe, who was clutching her bottle under the shelter of her linen motor coat. Her eyes dropped. They were nearing Temple Hall. Far away a horn screamed resonantly; the Panhard replied.

"I'm going to run away as soon as I get down," he told her. "Problems daunt me. O ye of little heart!"

Chloe clutched her bottle. Was she also of little faith? She would lave in that stolen water this night in the solitude of her chamber. She would have grace and beauty in all her fair young body. At least there was a chance. It would do no harm.

The Panhard crawled up to the stables, and they descended. Bannatyne flew, waving a hand behind him, and followed by approving laughter. He had maintained the nonsensical pretense to the end; he was consistent; he had played out his part.

But already in himself a reaction had set in, and the current was flowing strongly. He experienced a surge of bitterness from the bottom of his soul. He passed by the house and went down the path. It was five o'clock; and tea would be available, but he wanted no tea. He descended the course of the stream toward the lodge gates.

The Wellingbourne, after passage through the gardens, flows in a clear bottom by devious curves through the park. It turns a private sawmill on the estate, and

goes in alternate deeps and shallows, by meadow and wood and by osiered banks, until it makes its exit under a roadway and pours into the flat pastures under the western hill. Once or twice the stream broadens into a pool, and in one of these the bathing place had been constructed, a bathing place fenced about with close-set hedges—a basin of marble, the hobby of a dead extravagant Coombe, approached by a level of soft green-sward.

Bannatyne reached this, and it caught his eye. The heat was almost at its height here in the valley, and he stood indecisively, drawn toward the thought of cool water. Then he turned and began to go forward, having remembered suddenly that this thought was impracticable; for this hour was reserved especially for the ladies.

As he resumed he was aware of a cry, repeated twice, and then of a voice raised in piteous entreaty. He came to a pause again, waiting, and what he heard made him jump quickly to a conclusion. The outcry came from the bathing place, and betokened some one in trouble. There could be no doubt of that. It was not mimic terror that sounded in that scream.

“Help!”

Bannatyne turned about and rushed for the entrance, which was not far from him. The gate was unlocked, and he threw it open and ran in and between the green hedges that intervened. A soft lawn turf led to the water's edge, but so closely was the basin veiled by the screens of hedge and shrubbery that he did not see

anything till he reached the verge of the water. Then what he saw set him again in motion round the bottom of the bath and flying toward the top.

One girl was in the deep water, clutching wildly at the smooth sides of the marble, while another leaned over and was grasping weakly and helplessly at her companion. Bannatyne reached them, and the one on the brink looked up. It was Kitty Latham. His eyes went down in a flash, and he saw who it was that struggled in the water below him. He stooped, lay flat upon his chest, and put down long arms. In two hands he seized her two hands and drew her upward. His muscles strained and cracked, for the pull of the water was tremendous; it sucked at its prey angrily. Bannatyne was of a slight build, in which his actual strength was not advertised; but the effort to drag her from the water proved too much for his strong sinews. He looked into eyes from which fear seemed to have fled; they were fixed on him trustfully.

"I must tow you down to shallow water," he said, breathing hard. "You're not afraid?"

"No." Her breath also came hard.

He got to his feet with difficulty, and in a painful stooping position crawled down the basin's edge, still grasping her hands. A long swirl and foam of water followed the passage of her body. She breasted the water like a naiad, the blue of her dress showing through the ripples of the white water. Bannatyne stopped.

"Now," he said, and smiled at her.

She rose to her feet stumblingly, and he gathered all his strength to draw her forth. She rose out of the pool and tottered upon the brink, so that he caught her in his arms, and she lay there.

"Safe!" he murmured smilingly. She smiled back and stood up. "How did you—" he began, but she had not yet got her balance, and tottered again. He put out an arm as before, but he was unwontedly, strangely excited. He was on the brink, and his feet went over the edge. Bannatyne was plunged with a splash into the noisy water.

He rose to the surface with a grimace, and hatless. His clothes hung ridiculously; he had the air of a trick performer, as he waded awkwardly to the edge. Kitty Latham looked startled, but relieved, for the water here was only four feet in depth. Lady Cynthia, who was seated on a wooden seat, recovering, uttered a little breathless laugh. Perhaps it was half hysterical; yet Bannatyne's plunge had been pantomimic, and he was conscious of it. He emerged, squeezing the water from his coat with a rueful smile.

"I'm afraid I rather spoiled the effect of that," he said. "It ought to have been dramatic, but it's turned out merely farcical. Lady Cynthia, how did you manage yours?"

She smiled faintly. "I mistook the deep water," she said with difficulty.

He looked at Miss Latham. It was evident from her costume that she had not even been in. The accident had discovered her undressing; her bodice was

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open, showing her white throat; but she was all unconscious.

"And I—and we can't swim," said Kitty Latham, with a gulp in her throat. She looked now to be on the verge of tears.

Bannatyne squeezed more water from his coat.

"I seem bound to be a mock hero," he observed lightly. "I save people from all kinds of absurdities—Miss Arden from a bull that's a cow, Miss Latham from a bee that wouldn't bite, and Lady Cynthia from water that wouldn't drown."

"It's eight feet," said Kitty seriously.

"Yes, but Lady Cynthia could have crept along the ropes to the shallows," he said, still squeezing.

Lady Cynthia started. "I didn't—I couldn't find them. I didn't—oh, how utterly stupid of me!"

Bannatyne looked at Kitty Latham reproachfully. "I'm really tired of being a sham hero," he said. "Don't give me away, please."

Lady Cynthia changed color; she looked away abruptly; her breath was still coming fast, but she had quite recovered.

"And I'm grateful for one thing," went on Bannatyne. "It was good of you ladies not to laugh at me."

CHAPTER XVII

WELL MET BY MOONLIGHT

As Bannatyne entered the house he encountered Chloe, who gazed at him in dismay.

"What has happened?" she asked in the friendly way into which she had fallen with him.

"Don't tell anyone," he replied. "I've been bathing in the magic well, and it's made me hideous. At least, do you think I'm so hideous, Miss Chloe?" he implored.

She laughed, shaking her head. "Not very," she said. "Now *we'll* have to hide," she retorted on him.

"Oh, no; it's the reverse effect on a man, I find. It's treacherous stuff. I'm going to hide myself forever. Good-by. Remember me sometimes."

He went upstairs and sought his room, to change; and after he had changed, he read for a little, then sauntered into the billiard room. It was still some time to dinner, but he was tired of the day. The light was garish, he declared to Madgwick, who invited him out. He knocked the balls about more or less aimlessly and smoked a cigarette, and had fallen into a reverie when he heard his name. Bouverie stood in the entrance.

"Bannatyne," said Bouverie, advancing solemnly toward him, and removing his cigar from his mouth to enhance the gravity of the occasion—"Bannatyne, I am deputed by a majority of the male members of this house party to put to you a straight question. Your conduct has been under serious discussion, and I have been chosen reluctantly to represent and voice the unanimous opinion of the men, particularly the younger ones."

"You're not making a speech in Parliament, Peter," said Bannatyne rudely. "Get on."

"To cut a long story short, as you are so bad-tempered, I have to ask—How many of these girls do you want?"

"Which girls?" asked Bannatyne, ceasing to knock the balls about.

Bouverie spread his fingers out. "All," he said. "I understand the phrase to include all. I'm not sure about Miss Ashcroft, but all else."

Bannatyne resumed work with his cue. "I don't know that I want any of them," he said moodily. "I won't stand in your light. I'm only *Cap and Bells*."

"But you don't see the point," said Bouverie. "That makes it worse. You forget that all women dote on actors, music-hall singers, and nigger minstrels."

"Well, we're all actors," remarked Bannatyne, making a shot for a pocket and missing, "and, anyway, I'm tired of being one, and shall throw up the part."

"Good heavens! what will Lady Coombe——"

"Oh, no, I'll carry out my engagements there," said

Bannatyne, putting his cue in the stand. "I meant generally."

Bouverie regarded him thoughtfully, and turned slowly on his heel. "These are but daydreams, my dear fellow," he called over his shoulder. "A flash of moonlight will convert you again. Anyway, I believe it's wholesome for you. It's bad for me. I'm too old, and have lost the privilege of seeing fairies by moonlight. Better look to your costume, *Lysander*. Mine's a beautiful one. I look like the Pantaloon, and shall capture all hearts, therefore." He nodded genially as he went out, and after a pause Bannatyne followed him. He had forgotten the rehearsal that evening was to be in full dress.

But Lady Coombe had not, nor had any other of the party. The hour before dinner, instead of being, as it usually is, the dulllest of the twenty-four, was one of the liveliest. Girls flew about frantically in all directions; men sat about and cracked jokes; and the excitement was quite as great as if the actual performance had arrived. After an early dinner all dispersed to dress in the marquees which had been set up well out of sight, at the back of *Titania's* Glade, which was to be the theater of the pastoral play. *Lysander* wore a doublet of green, with fine lace insertions, and his hose were of a similar color. A note of red characterized *Demetrius*. *Titania* was gorgeous with white samite, mystic, wonderful, and overflowed with pearls. *Helena* and *Hermia* were magnificently brave in raiment, as was *Hippolyta*, and never was there a more becoming cos-

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tume than the self-colors of the fairies. In lavender Lady Cynthia flitted past him under the moon, and did not recognize him. He saw Chloe and Kathleen, Kitty Latham and Miss Bellenden, and Gladys, too, all aglow with excitement and alive with beauty. They streamed past him like rainbow colors. It was a pretty bevy of fairies, and outshone the mortals. They glistened in the soft silver light; they seemed to be what they were supposed to be, ethereal; their very feet went noiseless over the grass. Their voices called musically to one another.

“Kitty!”

“Chloe!”

“Cynthia!”

Hancock, important, businesslike, brusque, rang a handbell.

“Now, then, is all our company here? Very well. Mind you, this is business. It's our last. No fooling on anyone's part. Madgwick and Mrs. Battye, a bit this way for entrance. That's it. The overture is on now; it dies away. Now, enter *Theseus*.”

Bannatyne stood watching with indifferent interest till it was his cue to enter. He was aware soon of an undernote in Miss Grant-Summers which arrested him. She made an excellent *Hermia*, and far surpassed Miss Arden in the rôle of *Helena*. What was it new in her manner?

“‘My good Lysander!

I swear to thee by Cupid's straightest bow . . .

To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.’”

A positive note of color was pronounced in her dress, and she looked handsomer than he had ever seen her, as well as more challenging. But was it that she pressed their intimacy closer? She played at him, and he was in the mood to admire and to play back. Her bold smile met and countered his; she raised her eyebrows, which had the effect of familiarity, and was quite pleasing. He had no feeling for Miss Grant-Summers more definite than that of attraction to a beauty that advertised itself, that was living to its full strength and tide of blood; but that sufficed. The scene went with a swing that took the audience, and there was a little round of applause. Miss Grant-Summers tripped off, alertly self-conscious, her head charmingly poised as she cast an inquiring glance back across her shoulder at Bannatyne. He followed congratulatory.

"Oh, I think it should go all right," she said with diffidence that was gentle assurance. "Do you mind helping me with this cloak?"

She turned her shoulder toward him as she spoke, with a certain air of authority.

"'Help me, *Lysander*, help me! do thy best,'" she quoted, parting her ripe lips in a smile.

"A cloak!" he echoed, and with a glance at her, took hold of it as it hung on her shoulders. "No, I will be no party to it—to this unprecedented concealment," he said. "'Tis a crime. Why wraps, this eventful night?"

"Would you have me catch cold?" she challenged.

"It is an urbane and benignant air," he argued. "Please—to oblige me."

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She laughed softly, and turned round so that the wrap fell into his arms. "As you will," she said. "But you are quite mad, and I think I am to listen to you."

"I hope so," he said. "What better than to be mad together?"

Just then several people surged about them, and a confused debate was in progress.

"No; white, I think, Miss Bellenden."

"Oh, but it ought to be blue."

"Chloe, you surely don't mean to say——"

"Why not have it red, white, and blue?" This was Gay.

"Miss Grant-Summers, don't you think that Gladys should be in white?" appealed Miss Bellenden.

"Does it matter?" said Miss Grant-Summers coldly, and shrugging her shoulders.

"Black and blue, I suggest," remarked Bannatyne. His companion shot her appreciation at him in a smile that confided in him their dissociation from the rabble of girls and youths.

But Miss Bellenden was not to be so easily denied. She was a beauty and an heiress to boot, and she was accustomed to her own way. She forced debate on Miss Grant-Summers, with the invaluable assistance of the persistent Gay.

Bannatyne discovered some one close to him.

"Mr. Bannatyne," said Lady Cynthia in a troubled voice, "I wanted to tell you something, if I may."

He twisted about sharply. "Lady Cynthia, I am all attention," he said lightly.

"I wanted to confess to you, and to apologize," she went on hurriedly and tremulously. "You thanked us for not laughing this afternoon when you—you saved my life, and I did laugh. I'm bitterly ashamed of myself. I couldn't help it. I don't know what came over me. I just had to laugh. I—oh, I am so ashamed, after what you'd done, too!"

"My dear Lady Cynthia," said Bannatyne, "the laugh was a natural reaction from a time of strain and stress. It was nature's relief or cure. Through laughter pours health. It is a safety valve through which the steam whistles. No, I don't seem to have got that very elegantly. When a young lady laughs, you shouldn't tell her that she's been steam-whistling. Besides, I *was* a sight! I laughed myself."

She looked incredulously and almost shyly at him.

"I did," he assured her. "I was struck all of a heap after dinner at the ludicrous figure I had cut, and I laughed so much that Bouverie gave me a comic paper to stop me."

She smiled. "It's awfully good of you," she said; "but I never shall forget it, nor how you saved my life, nor——"

He put up a playful hand. "Don't! please, don't! I am becoming rapidly a hero, *malgré moi*. I shall soon begin to believe in myself, like a member of Parliament. Don't let's be serious; let us take life flippantly, Lady Cynthia, knowing that nothing matters; and if it does, never mind."

Lady Cynthia made no reply; perhaps she had not

expected this sort of statement. He began to walk on, and she walked with him still in silence.

"I shall be sad when this wonderful house party breaks up," he declared. "I shall miss my moonlight and my friends."

"It has been great fun," she agreed, "and the weather has been perfect. I wonder if it will hold over to-morrow."

"Sure," he said. "The papers all prophesy a bad week end. We shan't even get the customary thunderstorm that makes up one-third of the English summer. Where do you go afterwards?"

"We go back to Wynnstay Gardens for a fortnight, I think," said Lady Cynthia, "and then my father is going to Badheim, and we go to—I'm not sure," she broke off rather uncertainly. "We may stay with my sister," she added.

Bannatyne wondered. Had it to do with Eastwood? Was it anticipated that Lady Fallowfield and her daughter would go later to Gratton Towers? In that case no doubt the announcement of the engagement would be made ere the end of the season. Halfway across the glade she turned:

"They will want me," she said; "my scene is coming on."

They returned in silence amid the bracken, and she vanished from him into the circle. He stood and watched, till Bouverie joined him, awaiting his cue.

"It's amazingly pretty, isn't it?" said *Oberon*. "It's so nice to be pretty and foolish! You're thinking of

settling down, Bannatyne?" he waved his hand toward the flashing scene. "Just regard my own *Titania's* court. I have a great critical taste in beauty, all the more that I have no personal interest in it left. And I assure you that it can't be beat, my dear fellow. Down, down, foolish heart!"

Bannatyne made no reply, and his friend examined him shrewdly under the moon. Then he got his call, and went on his way.

The rehearsal satisfied Hancock up to the beginning of the third act, but at the famous *Bottom* scene it went wrong. Again and again he brought the characters back, and he vexed himself into perspiration and a temper.

Bannatyne, looking round, saw a little way from him Lady Cynthia Dane standing in a muse, as she listened idly to Hancock's criticisms. It was not her scene. A thought seized on him, enduing him with courage; he passed over to her and touched her arm. She started.

"This is intolerable," he said. "Let us walk to the head of the glade, or we shall all lose our tempers!"

She said nothing, but smilingly obeyed, and soon the rehearsal was a mere knot of undeciphered figures in the distance. Bannatyne did not pause at the head of the glade; he entered the wood, putting out a hand to assist his companion. He could not tell if she hesitated; she did not appear to do so; and presently they were treading the grassy path of the Wilderness, with the

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moon throwing their shadows palely before them as they walked.

"This was where I lost my way the night I arrived," he said.

"You are hardly encouraging," she said, smiling.

"Oh, I know better now," he told her. "I have learned much since, very much. I have learned much about the Wilderness and human nature."

"Human nature?" she asked.

"Yes, particularly feminine nature."

"Oh, you can't be sure of that," she said archly.

"No," he admitted; "but I think so. Of course, I won't swear. You see, I've been on a mission while here. I've had a quest."

"Quest?"

"Yes. Can you keep a secret? I don't suppose you can. But I am moved to confide in you. I shall do something desperate if I don't tell some one. Lady Cynthia, by the memory of that service in church, swear to respect my confidence."

"I swear," she said, laughing.

"Well, I've been looking for Cinderella."

"Cinderella!" echoed Lady Cynthia, coming to a pause. "Don't you think we'd better take this path? It will take us back sooner."

He swung into the path. "And that reminds me of the story of the Dryad and the Shoe, Lady Cynthia, which, as you have not yet heard, I will now proceed to relate."

He told his story drolly and lightly, and with a

certain extravagance. "And so, you see, Lady Scheherezade," he concluded, "that there was only one thing left for me to do: to search for the owner of the shoe, whom I had sworn on that sacred altar to marry."

"You swore to marry her?" asked Lady Cynthia lightly.

"I took the vow then and there, if she should ever be discovered; and subsequent events have made me redouble my vows," he declared.

"You were very rash," said she.

"I was a prince in a fairy tale," he said.

"You mean you were bound by the exigencies of your position?"

"Yes," said he gravely. "All princes in fairy tales swear to wed people they have never seen; and as for all princesses, their fathers swear it for them. It's Rule Number 1,001. The duty of a fairy prince is to marry the farthest and most difficult and least known princess. Duty is duty, and even beauty is bound by it. Some think that duty is only skin deep; but it's a mistake— isn't it, Lady Cynthia?"

"I—I suppose so," she responded.

"Duty," said Bannatyne sententiously, "permeates all life, from the nursery to the grave. Duty is one of those things-in-themselves of which Plato wrote: 'Duty is the Absolute.' If we only knew what the mischief it was," he added reflectively.

"We have some guides," she suggested.

He waved his hand. "Oh, yes; there is the cate-

chism. There is a duty to God, and there is a duty to our neighbors. I wonder what our duty to our neighbors really is. Does it include speaking the truth, and nothing but the truth? And is there such a thing as duty toward ourselves?"

"I should say so," she replied.

"How would you define it?"

"I don't think I could define it," she said uneasily.

"Not to lose the good of life," he suggested, "consistently with other people's welfare? That's rough, but it's comprehensive. I think it covers most points. It covers, for example, *marriage de convenance*."

"I don't understand," said Lady Cynthia faintly.

"There is a kind of cant," he said, "which calls itself duty toward 'our order.' I loathe it. There is a duty toward human nature, but there is no duty toward Our Order, or anyone's order. It is sickening snobbery or hypocrisy, or—well, give it any name you will. Because 'our order' has to be kept up, or thinks it has to be kept up, sacrifices are demanded—the lamb is dumb before her shearers. Iphigenia perishes on the altar—I had almost said *at* the altar."

Lady Cynthia did not speak in the silence that ensued, and he went on presently:

"Money mates with a title; beauty with notoriety. It is all unclean. There is only one clear duty sticking out here, and that is the duty of obedience to nature—nature, Lady Cynthia, that we see around us now, in this glory of midsummer."

"Nature makes mistakes," said she quietly.

"Oh, yes, she blunders, but she gets there," he declared.

He stopped, and looked about on the edge of the wood, through which the high moon was shining. The glade was bathed in light. She, too, came to a pause and was silent.

"Lady Cynthia! Lady Cynthia!" rose a voice suddenly on the outskirts of the wood. "Lady Cynthia, you're wanted!"

It was Gay's voice. The girl started forward, but he put a detaining hand on her arm.

"Hush!" he said. "Let him be—let him call."

"I must go," she murmured. "We ought not to have come so far away. They are waiting."

"Lady Cynthia!" called Gay, breaking through the wood.

He advanced in their direction. "I'm sure I saw some figures through the branches!" he cried back to some one on the border of the glade. "Lady Cynthia!"

She moved uneasily; the moonlight was full on her as she stood in the path. Bannatyne's hand closed more firmly on her arm, and she was drawn back into the shadow, where she stayed unresisting. She did not speak, or look at him. Gay approached, calling. It would have been impossible to answer now, and she saw it. Gay passed within a few feet of them up the path, and she shrank closer to her companion. The blunder of not replying to the call at once had con-

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founded her. Her heart beat fast. Bannatyne pulled her nearer; she was in the deep shadow, and his arm was about her. Gay passed slowly upward, and his figure faded between the tree stems and finally disappeared behind a bank of yews. Lady Cynthia stirred, and extricated herself from the reluctant arm.

"Why did you do that? Oh, why?" she said in a troubled voice.

For answer he stooped under the tumultuous swirl of his passion, and, picking up the soft hem of her raiment, put it to his lips. She drew away, with increasing agitation.

"What are you doing?" she cried in distress.

Bannatyne was almost as agitated as she; his hands trembled as he put them out to seize hers.

"No, no!" she cried, and started away very quickly. "I must go. It is late. Let me go." She began to run fast along the pathway toward the glade, flashing in and out of the moonlight as she sped. Bannatyne hesitated a moment and then darted after her. She ran fast, as fast as that Daphne of whom he had spoken lightly to the three girls that afternoon, and behind he followed eagerly, ardently, with the pulse of his passion leaping in him.

She gained the open, without casting back a glance, and suddenly he came to a stop. She was not six paces in front of him, and she was still hurrying, now with stumbling feet and breathlessly among the bracken. Bannatyne stood stock still, breathing deeply from the emotions that filled him. He watched her go.

“ I couldn’t help it,” he murmured, “ I couldn’t help it. But it was brutal. She did not know. What does she know? ” He waited some five minutes, and then he descended into the glade, and made his way circuitously to the distant scene of the rehearsal.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HANDKERCHIEF

HANCOCK was in a lively humor at supper, a transitory meal, at which the guests appeared only if they felt disposed. Some made pretense of eating, some really ate, and others abstained altogether. Hancock on this occasion was manifesting a huge appetite, and his example was followed by several others.

"It's hard work," said he. "Don't apologize for those meringues, Miss Arden. Don't you know that we have done a day's work in three hours? I know I have."

"I'm not going to apologize," said Miss Arden gayly, "and I'm going to ask for some wine."

Sir Edward nodded approval, and Bouverie poured out a glass of champagne for her. There were only two servants in waiting, for this was considered a most informal and friendly meal.

"Dear me! dear me!" fluttered Lady Coombe's voice down the table, "I'm sure it will go all wrong. The man trod on my skirts twice to-night, and nearly fell over two of my fairies. He's terribly clumsy."

"Oh, that was Lady Cynthia," said Walrond; "she wasn't looking where she was going, but just marched straight on."

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"Where's Lady Cynthia?" asked Lady Coombe, glancing round.

"I think she's gone to bed," said Miss Merrington; "she was very tired."

Bannatyne, seated next to Miss Ashcroft, held his ears attentive. He crumbled a piece of bread between his fingers nervously, but did not eat. He had taken two glasses of champagne.

"You do not honor us often in this way," he said to his neighbor.

"No," she said. "I've told you my opinion about the way we feed. We eat too grossly and too often, but, after all, there is the question of company to be considered. Now, I am no sleeper; I doze merely, as anyone who has had experience of me could testify," she said, looking at him steadily. "And I prefer light company and light slumber at this hour."

"What about light reading?" he asked politely. He was not, somehow, greatly interested in Miss Ashcroft's habits just then. Indeed, his gaze was restlessly vagrant about the table, until he found what he wanted, which was Kitty Latham's face at some distance. Miss Ashcroft followed his glance. She did not reply to his vague question.

"A pretty fairy," she remarked, with a slight inquiry in her voice.

"Sweetly pretty," said he, nodding, and smiled as Miss Latham's glance encountered his. She flushed, and turned her head to address Walrond.

"By the way," said Miss Ashcroft abruptly, "if you

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would really like to explore the eastern corridor, I dare say I could make arrangements for you with the inmates."

"Explore!" he echoed, and then shook his head. "I don't think I'm good at exploration," he said. "I'm a failure. I'll resign my ambitions. Never shall I meet you in those perturbing wilds, with 'Miss Ashcroft, I believe?'"

"No; it certainly was not I," she said bluntly. It was her first direct reference to their midnight encounter, and his quest. He knew she knew, and gazed at her doubtfully.

"I think I've lost all curiosity," he declared. "I've taken your lesson to heart. I'm no longer inquisitive. The fact is, I can think of nothing but the play. I'm stage-struck."

"Oh, well," she shrugged her shoulders. "You add inconstancy to inquisitiveness. I might have guessed."

"I don't know. I will not plead guilty," he said.

"The moon is constant to her course;
The sun will never fail."

He pointed through the window. "There she sails. And yet they talk of the inconstant moon. The fact is, one side charges the other invariably with its own vices. 'Men were deceivers ever.' It is monstrous!"

"But the accusation of inconstancy is usually brought against women," said Miss Ashcroft dryly. "How does that affect your reasoning? It seems to fix you in a cleft stick."

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Bannatyne pondered. "Confound Virgil! I believe it does. '*Varium ac mutabile.*' Well, why shouldn't they be? After all, it's only changing your mind on better information probably, or experience."

"It certainly is possible to work up a defense," she agreed. "You mustn't expect to find me hostile there."

"Are you one of those who would break an engagement at the eleventh hour?" he asked suddenly.

Miss Ashcroft pursed up her lips. "I have never been fool enough to make one," she said. "But if you put it to me theoretically, yes."

"You have sound common sense," he replied. "I always valued your opinions."

She looked at him as if she were about to say something, but Lady Coombe's voice broke in:

"Will it be fine, Mr. Bannatyne?" she asked imploringly.

"I will see to it," he said, shooting a glance at Lord Eastwood, who sat beside him.

"Mr. Bouverie says the glass is falling," she said piteously.

"I didn't quite say the glass was falling," hedged Bouverie. "I said that the glass had fallen. You will observe there is a distinct difference between the two. The glass may now be going up."

"I do so hope it will be fine," said the hostess, gathering sympathetic eyes in her course. "It would be so dreadful if we didn't get a decent sum for the Cottage Hospital. We reckoned on quite one hundred pounds."

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"The performance will cost twice that," murmured Hancock in Bouverie's ear.

"If I made more I think I would give the balance to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children," continued Lady Coombe. "I have such a great belief in that society."

"Why not split the takings between them?" suggested her husband.

"I do want the Cottage Hospital to get one hundred pounds," she objected.

"I suggest we start a guarantee fund, then," said Bouverie. "Who will guarantee a tenner?"

"Oh, I'll guarantee the hundred pounds," said Sir Edward smilingly. "If it's wet, it will cost me a new hunter, I suppose."

"Oh, then that knocks the bottom out of our sport," said Bouverie plaintively. "Well, you can have the guarantee all to yourself, Coombe. I call upon volunteers to make up a sum as free gift over and above for the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Come along now."

"Make it fivers," suggested Hancock, "and we'll all go in."

"I will do nothing of the sort," said Bouverie, now possessed with an idea, and rising to his feet. "I'll put up something, and you shall bid for it, and all bids will be converted into cash after the sale. It's a new way of auctioneering I've just invented."

"You mean we must all pay?" asked Hancock.

"Of course. What you bid you stand by. Now,

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then, give me a start. Shall I say five pounds, Mr. Gay?"

"I should like to know what we're bidding for," said Gay's high voice.

"Oh, anything," said Bouverie indifferently. "I have a fountain pen." His eyes wandered. "No, let me have that handkerchief, Miss Latham, will you, please?" He dexterously snatched it from her hands as he spoke, and dangled a pretty square of lace before the table.

"Oh, but it's not mine! that's Lady Cynthia's," protested Kitty.

"Is it? Well, she won't mind," said Bouverie. "Yes, I see there's 'C. D.' in the corner. It's of no consequence. Now, then, Mr. Gay."

"Five pounds," said that young man, and explained, in an undertone, to Atherton that he had not a red cent left.

"Five pounds!" said Bouverie, looking about him with an inviting, watchful eye. "Five pounds only for this work of art—five pounds only for the noble object of preventing children from suffering. Any advance on five pounds, Mr. Atherton?"

"Oh, yes, a fiver," said he.

"You don't seem to understand, gentlemen," said Bouverie, with a sigh of exasperation, dropping the spoon he had taken up to do duty as a hammer. "This is an auction, only a peculiar kind of auction. Therefore, because it's an auction, each bid to be taken must be higher than the preceding bid; and because it is

peculiar, we keep each bid. Now, then, we will mount by sovereigns."

"Six," said Atherton.

"Thank you, sir. I knew I was not mistaken, and that this valuable object would not be allowed to go for a paltry five pounds. Mr. Hancock, will you kindly make a note of the proceedings, as we shall have to collect the money subsequently? Mr. Gay, five; Mr. Atherton, six. Going, at six; going, at six. Any advance on six?"

"Seven," called out Mrs. Battye.

"Thank you, seven. Any advance upon seven? Well, ladies and gentlemen, this is ridiculous! Have you got that seven, Hancock? I say this is supremely ridiculous! It makes my position absurd. It is positively throwing the handkerchief away. Seven pounds only. Any advance on seven? Going, at seven pounds. I may say frankly that there is a reserve price on it, which has not yet been reached. Going, at seven. Thank you, Madgwick, eight. Eight are offered; I am offered eight. Any advance on eight pounds? Going, at eight."

"Nine," called out Walrond.

"Nine—nine pounds bid. And a valuable handkerchief like this, embroidered, finest Honiton lace, initialed in one corner. Nine pounds only. Eh? what?" he said to Hancock, and stooped. "Gentlemen, here's my clerk, a poor, hard-working auctioneer's clerk, who's moved by the ridiculous lowness of the bidding to bid himself. He offers ten. Ten I'm bid—ten. Now, don't forget *that* bid, Hancock. Ten I'm bid."

Bannatyne sat with his eyes on the speaker, a little

smile of appreciation in his eyes, and he exchanged a word now and then with Miss Ashcroft.

"This, I think, is where I must come in," she said in an undertone, and nodded emphatically.

"Miss Ashcroft, eleven," said Bouverie. "Thank you."

Bannatyne's smile grew; the light danced in his face. He had made up his mind to wait and come in at the end victoriously. He was a little excited. Ferris and others took the bidding up to fifteen, and Bouverie announced solemnly at sixteen pounds that the reserve had been reached.

"That's me," he explained informally and amid laughter.

Lord Eastwood had not yet bid, and the auctioneer looked toward him.

"I regret to find," he said solemnly, "that in this room there are apparently two people so dead to the sense of charity and the value of this pocket handkerchief as not to have hazarded a single bid yet. It is disgraceful. I will not name names, but I content myself with the general observation. Sixteen pounds."

"Seventeen," said Lord Eastwood, smiling.

"Eighteen," said Bannatyne softly.

"Thank you, gentlemen. Now we're getting on. Anyone else? Going, at eighteen pounds. Any advance on eighteen? Going, at eighteen."

Bouverie raised his spoon perfunctorily, for, as he had worked through all the company, he looked upon his task as over.

"Going—going——"

"Nineteen," said Lord Eastwood suddenly.

Bouverie glanced toward him. "Oh, very well," said he. "Nineteen good, nineteen offered."

"Twenty," said Bannatyne in his pleasantly musical voice.

"Thank you, sir—twenty," said the auctioneer.

The interest in the room tightened in a jerk, and eyes were directed at the two men, who sat at remote ends of the table.

"A superexcellent article of vertu," said Bouverie, "guaranteed and highly recommended. Gentlemen, this is, if I may say so, ridiculous! Only twenty pounds I'm offered for this priceless object—only twenty pounds."

"Twenty-one," said Lord Eastwood, opening his somewhat heavy jaw.

"Twenty-two," said his adversary lightly.

Eastwood nodded again, "Twenty-three"; and Bannatyne responded with "Twenty-four"; and Eastwood replied with "Twenty-five."

"Gentlemen," said Bouverie cheerfully, "all these sums will be added together into a total, which total will represent the full sum of your bid."

He paused, glancing at them. Eastwood cast an eye toward Bannatyne, and the two men nodded at the auctioneer.

"Very well, then," said the latter, "I'm offered twenty-five. Hancock, note these bids, please. Any advance on five-and-twenty?"

The interest deepened, and people concentrated their

attention on the contending bidders. A suspicion that this contest was more significant than appeared on the surface, passed from face to face. Ferris elevated his eyebrows at Hancock across the table, and Atherton winked at one of his friends. Miss Arden looked on with polite interest, and Kitty Latham's face betrayed her excitement, which was only equaled by Chloe's. Miss Ashcroft watched the scene with eyes that missed nothing.

"Twenty-six."

"Twenty-seven."

"Twenty-eight."

"Twenty-nine."

"Thirty."

At thirty the game was with Bannatyne, and a slight pause ensued, while Bouverie continued to extol the merits of the handkerchief.

"What's the total now?" asked Eastwood presently. "I think we might know that."

Bouverie looked down at Hancock's pocketbook. "How much is it?" he asked. His "clerk" rapidly added up some figures:

"Lord Eastwood, a hundred and sixty-one pounds; Bannatyne, a hundred and sixty-eight," he said.

"I would suggest we have the lump sum declared, then," said Lord Eastwood; "then we shall know better where we are."

"You mean, the bidding is with Bannatyne at a hundred and sixty-eight pounds," said Bouverie. "Yes, it will be more convenient, as we shall all know then

how much this excellent charity will be benefited. And we'll rise—" He hesitated, looking from one to the other.

"By twenties," said Bannatyne.

Bouverie's face inquired of the other man. "Yes," he said curtly. "Then I am bid a hundred and sixty-eight pounds for this lovely article," said Bouverie in his stolid way.

Eastwood nodded. "Thank you—one hundred and eighty-eight; I am bid only one hundred and eighty-eight. Gentlemen, this ought to have been the reserve price. Thank you." He caught Bannatyne's nod. "Two hundred and eight."

The bidding ran up furiously now, Bannatyne hesitating not a moment in his challenge, and Eastwood slowly and doggedly returning his fire. It reached three hundred and forty-eight, and the undersecretary paused momentarily. He looked reflectively at Bouverie, who stood with uplifted spoon inquiringly.

"Three hundred and forty-eight! Why, it's giving it away," said the auctioneer.

Eastwood nodded. He was beginning to get annoyed, and he hated a scene. This seemed to be turning into a scene, which threatened to compromise his dignity. He shot an embarrassed smile at Lady Coombe, and looked back at the imaginary rostrum to find that his rival had bidden "three hundred and sixty-eight."

He nodded again shortly, and his discomposure grew. As for Bannatyne, he sat, his elbow on the table, with his eyes dancing lightly between Bouverie and Miss Ash-

croft, who sat on one side of him, or some other member of the company, Kitty Latham across the way, or Chloe with the parted lips, who stared at him joyously.

“‘How sweet it is to stand upon the bank and watch the swimmer drown!’ as Lucretius says,” he murmured to Miss Ashcroft. “I know you’re quite excited; your heart’s beating. Lord Eastwood and I are butchered to make a house party’s holiday.” He nodded at Bouverie just in time.

“Four hundred and eight,” announced the auctioneer.

“Is that exactly why you’re bidding?” asked Miss Ashcroft, piercing him with her gray eyes.

“Incidentally,” he said. “But, of course, there is no charity so richly deserving of support as that of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.”

“Four hundred and forty-eight,” Bouverie called.

There was again a pause. Excitement was at its height. Bannatyne chatted lightly.

“You see, I won a bet. I have a friend who knows about horses, or says he does, because he owns them, I suppose—which is an extraordinary presumption. And he told me that he had a horse which would win the Jubilee, or something, and advised me to back it. In order to feel what it was like to back a horse, I did—at least I thought I did. I forgot the name of his horse, but I remembered it began with a ‘G’; and as there was only one horse in the race which began with a ‘G,’ I backed that. The Gee won, if I may put it in that way, but it wasn’t my friend’s horse. That’s what I call showing judgment.”

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"Four hundred and sixty-eight," declared Bouverie, who had spent more time rehearsing the points of the handkerchief.

"Four eighty-eight," he announced the next moment.

"So I feel bound to spend my ill-gotten gains on a deserving object," continued Bannatyne, as if nothing had happened.

Lord Eastwood made a turn away. He shrugged his shoulders. The affair *had* deteriorated into a scene, and he was furious. But his face showed nothing; indeed, he gave a little indifferent laugh as he moved away, shaking his head at Bouverie's invitation.

"Gone, at four hundred and eighty-eight—Mr. Bannatyne," said Bouverie in formal auctioneer manner.

"As my 'G' turned out to be an outsider, I won five hundred pounds," continued Bannatyne, without a change of his expression, and without looking up from his talk with Miss Ashcroft. "So I've got twelve pounds left for emergencies. Do you know of any worthy object?"

"Yes," said the lady quickly, "I think I do; I'll turn it over in my mind and let you know later. While you're in this mood I had better take advantage of it."

She smiled on him as she rose, and he rose too. The excitement had subsided somewhat, and people were leaving the supper table, no doubt to discuss the auction and its significance.

"This belongs to you, I believe, Bannatyne," said Bouverie, with immovable face, as he held out the handkerchief.

Bannatyne took it and put it in his pocket, and turned to receive Lady Coombe's excited thanks.

"How awfully nice of you and Lord Eastwood! It really was splendid! And now I can send a check to the society, and help the Cottage Hospital too."

"Somewhere about a thousand, Lady Coombe," said Bouverie, after a consultation with Hancock. "But now we'll have to raise the cash. The auctioneer receives the money, I believe, according to the rule of the trade, commission ten per cent. I'll post a notice to that effect at once."

Bannatyne, issuing from the room, met Miss Latham. He took out the handkerchief.

"As this is not yours, Miss Kitty," he said, "I will not offer to return it to you. I understand that it belongs to Lady Cynthia. I will give myself the pleasure of restoring it personally."

"Oh, but I'm sure Lady Cynthia wouldn't take it now," said Kitty, smiling. "You bought it."

He shook his head. "I bought it, with my eyes open, from a receiver of stolen goods," he said.

"Oh, I'm so glad you won from Lord Eastwood! It was splendid!" declared Chloe Merrington, almost dashing into him in her excitement.

"I'm so glad you enjoyed it," he laughed back as he went. He was not going to the smoking room; he was going to bed. "I enjoyed it myself," he said cheerfully.

When he had got as far as the library, Miss Ashcroft came out by the door and joined him.

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"I've been getting something to send me to sleep," she said. "I find that a regular course of classical fiction is the most successful treatment. Scott I have been through twice, and I'm halfway through 'Clarissa' now."

"'Clarissa' bores me," he said indifferently.

"'Clarissa' bores *me*," she returned, "which is precisely why I take her up to bed with me."

"If I wanted sleep I don't think I should take her to bed with me," he said. "She annoys me. Scott's a good bed book. So is Boswell; you can pick him up and read him anywhere, and it does not matter much if you leave off or go on. There's no mental strain in Boswell; he gently titillates—that's all."

"As I lie awake a good deal I must have a companion," Miss Ashcroft explained.

"Have you thought of that desirable charity?" he asked.

"I think I have," she said slowly, "but I'm not quite sure yet. I'll think over it to-night; but I fear I should want more than twelve pounds. I don't think it would be content with a balance. And it isn't a charity; it's an investment."

"My dear lady, I'd trust you with a fortune for investment," he averred.

"I'll think it over, then." She put out her hand in an unwonted friendly way. She was usually abrupt. "Oh, didn't I promise to tell you who lived in our alley? We are quite a miscellany, a varied company of both sexes. There is Captain Madgwick, Mr. Gay,

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Mr. Atherton, Mrs. Battye, Miss Arden, the two Miss Merringtons, and myself."

She paused. He looked at her and waited. He knew she had not finished her list, for something in her manner as well as from the fact that her voice had not taken on a dropping cadence. She was perceptibly silent; and then,

"And, oh, there's Miss Latham," she added.

Bannatyne bowed. "Thank you so much for the information," he said; "I shall sleep more peacefully for it. You have laid the ghost that haunted me, incidentally also the somnambulist who haunted you. Good night, and many thanks. Ah!" he stooped and picked up the volume of "*Clarissa*" she had dropped.

"Thank you," she said as he returned it. "You don't repent the extravagance this evening?" she asked.

"Extravagance!" he echoed. "Pray, what extravagance? I can recall none."

"No," she mused, "not necessarily extravagance, save to outward seeming. We pay least when we pay most, and a handkerchief may be worth a large sum in the end."

"I'm sure this one is well worth it," he declared.

He took it out of his pocket and gravely held it up for her inspection. If you have any knowledge of these things," he said, "you will at once recognize that the delicate work, the——"

Miss Ashcroft suddenly seized hold of one corner and pulled it toward her sharply—so sharply that it left his fingers.

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“What is this?” she said brusquely.

She was gazing at the initials—C. D.

Bannatyne answered nothing, but looked at her unblinkingly. “Of course, that is part of the value,” he said at last; “that explains the price.”

She returned it. “Oh!” she said shortly. “I thought—I didn’t know——”

She gave him good night abruptly, and strode off without finishing her sentence.

CHAPTER XIX

A FOOL, A FOOL! I MET A FOOL I' THE FOREST

AN unusual excitement prevailed at the moving feast of breakfast. Lady Coombe fluttered about in a state of almost hysterical agitation; she called people by their wrong names, helped herself to things which in ordinary circumstances she would not eat, and generally conducted herself as one whose mind was absent, torn by important affairs. Most of the house party were similarly affected, to a less degree, for on everyone it was borne in that this great day had come at last. The performance was fixed for seven o'clock, in *Titania's* Glade.

Lady Coombe was relieved of her fears when her maid pulled the curtains in the morning. The sun shone brightly, and searched the room with his warm rays. A few patches of white fleece were scattered in heaven; the very air hummed and throbbed with the approaching heat.

To the general unrest Miss Ashcroft contributed nothing, less even than Bouverie, whose appetite and whose leisurely movements were not at all disturbed by his surroundings. These two sat together and discussed not the pastoral play, but the charms of single blessedness.

"It's so satisfactory to be able to smoke a pipe anywhere in one's rooms at any time," he said.

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"And so delightful to be able to drink tea anywhere in the same place at any time," she said.

"Buns?" he asked. She shook her head decisively. "I thought buns and pastry always went with tea."

"That's married women," she snapped. "The fools don't know how to take care of their digestions. I do. I eat little, but I'm a gourmet."

"We can shake hands on that; so am I," said Bouverie.

"All sensible people are," she retorted, "and therefore all unmarried people. As we've nothing else to consider, we consider our stomachs, while other poor creatures are taken up with unnecessary emotions and bad food."

"You are a misanthrope; I am a misogynist," said Bouverie, nodding in assent.

"No; I don't know that I hate man," said Miss Ashcroft meditatively; "I despise him."

"Yes, I think that's about my attitude to women, too," he agreed. "I have an amused contempt for them. Fancy being taken in by beauty! Ridiculous!"

"Or wit!" she said. "Absurd!"

"It's all very well for boys, of course," he went on; "they are easily captivated, poor beggars. A faint blush, a rosebud mouth, blue eyes, corn-yellow hair, the turn of an arm—anything does for them."

"Girls, too," said Miss Ashcroft. "They will tremble into what they preposterously call love, but what merely arises from a bad digestion owing to cakes and

pastry, with pitiful delight. It makes one ashamed of one's sex; it's humiliating."

"The state of affairs prevailing here, for example," took up Bouverie, "is simply disgraceful."

"Here?" she said, eying him.

He shrugged his shoulders, and watched Miss Arden as she entered, coolly graceful. Miss Ashcroft followed his eyes.

"Yes," she said. "I believe you're right. House parties should be discouraged."

"Their influence for ill is trebled when you have a play on," he said gloomily. "Hardly a man will come out of it unwinged."

"And scarcely a woman," she added.

"Except, of course, you and me," he said.

"Yes, we must make that reservation," she assented.

"And there's one of them peppered all over," said Bouverie.

"Ah," said Miss Ashcroft, "I think I know him."

"I didn't say him," he declared.

"Oh, well, I do," she retorted. "I'm not afraid. Besides, women don't do these things—except, perhaps, girls with actors."

"We are actors," he reminded her.

"He is," she said shortly, and then: "I don't believe he's riddled at all. His hide's impervious—it's arrow-proof—it's gutta-percha."

Bouverie looked doubtful. "Well, they produce a sense of irritation, at any rate," he said; "a sore feeling, and there are always cracks in the armor joints."

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"Humph!" said Miss Ashcroft as she rose. "You saw that ridiculous scene last night?"

"My dear lady, I presided at it. It was my star part."

"*Oberon* was not very successful in his interferences with mortal love affairs," she said.

"Oh, he didn't come out badly," he called after her.

When Miss Ashcroft got outside, Kitty Latham and Lady Cynthia were arm in arm on the big lawn between the cedars. They clung affectionately to each other, and the older woman stood to watch them. Then with an odd expression on her face she moved toward them, and called:

"Miss Latham!"

Kitty turned, withdrew her arm from her friend's, and obediently went forward. She stood talking with Miss Ashcroft for some time, and Lady Cynthia, after walking and waiting a little time, grew impatient of being alone, and passed into the gardens.

She was a little pale this morning, for she had had a broken night. The incidents in the Wilderness with Bannatyne had profoundly disturbed her. She was bewildered by them, and by her sensations. Why had she allowed him to put his arm about her and draw her into the darkness? Why had she not replied to Gay? Above all, why had she broken out upon him with those stupid words? Her face and neck flushed as she remembered. She was hateful to herself, as hateful as he was to her. She could have beaten herself for the stupidity of her actions. Instead of behaving as any sensible and modest

girl would have behaved in the face of that provocation, she had done nothing; she had merely stammered forth some silly words and then run away. She ought to have turned on him in dignity and fury and have scorched him with her scorn; and before that he would have fallen away abashed. But as she pondered these things uneasily, her shame and anger grew to remember that she should never have given him the opportunity to take such a freedom. She vowed in her soul that she felt like any bank-holiday girl, cried out to herself that she was contaminated, and wished simultaneously that she might meet Bannatyne on that instant, so that she might cut him with cold eyes and freeze him with a frosty stare.

To such thoughts ran her troubled night, and in the morning she was little more at ease. She wished no longer to encounter and annihilate Bannatyne, merely to avoid him; but otherwise her temper remained the same, and, being left by Kitty, she became restless, and moved away, a prey to vague fears and tremors.

If Bannatyne should suddenly come out and see her she would be alone, and she would have no support. She clung to the moral support of Kitty, who had been summoned away. So fled Lady Cynthia Dane, with a tumultuous bosom, into the sunlit gardens.

Meanwhile Bannatyne had enjoyed no better rest, and, waking early, had gone forth to walk in the fresh air of the morning. He covered a distance of four miles to Thesinger by the field paths, and breakfasted there heartily at the inn. Then in a better mood he returned, stalking through the flowing corn, and by the

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copses in which the birds were now growing more silent day by day. When he got back the party was much scattered, but Lady Coombe was anxious to consult him on some point connected with the performance.

Bouverie had disappeared, some of the others were motoring, while others were fishing. Some of the ladies were busily engaged in amending the costumes in which certain defects were thought to be discerned. Lord Eastwood had gone out with his host to inspect the allotments.

Bannatyne, thrown on his own resources, started on a further walk. He was not in a mood for company, for he had his own thoughts to challenge him, and if they were not friendly thoughts at least they kept him occupied. He looked wistfully about the gardens as he left, in the faint hope that his eyes might alight on a well-remembered figure; but he saw no one, and, leaving the park, he struck up the steep chalk lane for the downs.

The lane was no more than a deep sunken gutter, of considerable width, which in the winter was a veritable water course. It was overhung with great trees that leaned slantwise from the banks, beech and oak and elm, and presently ran among yew trees dark and somber, through the thick foliage of which no sunshine penetrated; to that succeeded tall pines, with an undergrowth of hazel bushes; and at last the level of the rounded summit, stretching east and west, sown with a ragged forest and interspersed with holly and bramble and gorse and the wild-growing bracken. Bannatyne

walked on in a meditation which was bitter-sweet. Now that the morning was come, and the exaltation of the night was gone, he looked back with some scorn on his own folly. He had made an absurd figure of himself at the auction, and had possibly given occasion for tittle-tattle to the light tongues of the house party. It was true that most of the company were in ignorance that the handkerchief had been Lady Cynthia's, for Kitty Latham's cry had not gone beyond her immediate neighborhood. Even Miss Ashcroft had not known. But there remained in the situation enough awkwardness to give him a distaste for it. In general he would have embarked with idle conscience and a certain malicious joy on such an enterprise. He was far from feeling satisfaction, or even indifference, now. He had been a fool—a fool, to have allowed himself to stray into this attitude toward a girl, and doubly a fool to have advertised his sentiment so openly.

Yet, now he reflected on her, he could not brook that allegation of folly. Cynthia was divine; she moved in her beauty like a spirit of fire, and he thrilled to recall how he had held her in his arms and she had not struggled. At least she had barely struggled, no doubt taken by surprise. He wondered with what feelings she regarded him. He was afraid to meet her, which was why he had absented himself from the breakfast table. He had put her to the blush, and would deserve all the retaliation she might choose to make.

Under a vast cathedral of beeches struck to gold by the summer sun, he halted, and listened to the last

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choir of song birds. In a few days they would lapse into the long silence of midsummer, only to awaken with the turn of the year. As he stood, a prey to conflicting feelings of doubt, remorse, shame, and desire, his thoughts drifted to Kitty Latham. The surprise which he would otherwise have experienced at Miss Ashcroft's revelation had fallen on senses blunted by the stress of emotions. Yet he now recalled that the quest on which he had persuaded himself he was so set, and which he had pursued with the ardor of light-heartedness, was at an end. It was Kitty Latham whom he had encountered in the Wilderness, and Kitty Latham was his Dryad whom he had been so anxious to run to earth.

Sylvia Latham's daughter! His thoughts went back over fifteen years and hovered there reluctantly. Now he inspected his heart in a new light, he was disposed not to underestimate that old passion of his boyhood, but to assign it its value in another sphere. Sylvia Latham had been to him a divinity, at whose feet he knelt. He could kneel now, at five-and-thirty, and in all his maturity and knowledge, at the feet of no goddess; it was something else than that spiritual rapture that he craved. He was enchained in the beauty of a woman, and it was as a man that he yearned to dominate her.

The ancient beech before which he paused reared itself stanchly like a vast pillar in a nave. Its smooth stem disappeared lightly among gold-green leafage far above. On some of the neighboring trees the youths of the village had carved initials in their Sunday after-

noon strolls, and Bannatyne, under the influence of a lovelorn whimsey, took out his knife, opened it, and began to trace letters deeply in the bark. His meditations continued as he worked, and his hand moved almost mechanically; and so rapt was he in his brown study that he was not aware of the approach of feet along the grassway, nor did he know that he was no longer alone until a voice struck on his ear, startling him.

“A pretty pastime, Mr. Bannatyne—quite idyllic!”

He turned, and saw Miss Grant-Summers, who was regarding him with an enigmatic smile on her face. He stood back a foot from his work and surveyed it.

“Yes, it isn’t bad at all,” he said with *nonchalance*.

Miss Grant-Summers glanced at the neighboring beeches.

“This is where the village lovers declare themselves, isn’t it?” she said. “They celebrate their wenches on the trees, twine arms together, and talk ‘baby language.’” Her accent notified her scorn, but she still smiled.

Bannatyne, at his second glance, discovered that Captain Madgwick was now standing by her. He caught the sound of distant voices, too, from which he judged that others of a party were approaching.

“Is that so?” he added. “I have no knowledge of the matter you mention, but I am quite willing to believe it. These rustic lovers are good and faithful swains. This would seem to be their promenade, unless,” he added, “it is little boys from school.”

“Oh, dear, no,” said Miss Grant-Summers, shaking

her head emphatically. "This is the gallery of Venus—isn't it, Captain Madgwick? What lad ever carved that heart, or that true-lover's knot? No, this is where lovers sigh and vow. You are committed, Mr. Bannatyne."

She gazed at him, maliciously handsome, and he realized that there was intention in her talk. He stood between her and the beech on which he had been grav-ing a moment before. Suddenly she moved forward and past him. "Mr. Bannatyne has set us a puzzle, Captain Madgwick," she called lightly. "We must all take to guessing. What ever can P and C mean? Or is it P and O? That's a familiar sound—something to do with ships."

Bannatyne's fingers were clutched into the palm of his hand for an instant nervously, and then he slowly closed his knife. In his folly he had carved out two initials, the initials of two names. Madgwick twisted up his mustache in an appearance of deep thought.

"Police constable," he suggested.

"Oh, how unromantic!" said Miss Grant-Summers. "I'd sooner believe it was P and O. Mr. Lock, Mr. Gay, Lady Cynthia, can you guess this?"

Bannatyne swept swiftly about, and his gaze fell on three newcomers who were advancing toward them. His eyebrows went down momentarily in a little frown. Gay put up his eyeglass.

"P C," he said. "It's probably some village idiot been inscribing his sweetheart's initials."

"Really!" said Miss Grant-Summers pleasantly.

“Penelope something,” suggested Madgwick, “or Prudence.”

“I should say Patty,” said Gay, “or Polly. That’s the sort of names they have.”

“On the contrary,” said Miss Grant-Summers, “it’s the sort of name they haven’t. They fly high in these days. Patricia would be more like it, or Perdita. What do you say, Lady Cynthia?”

Lady Cynthia stood a little behind, and smiled faintly on being addressed. She looked rather pale in her white gown.

“Perhaps it isn’t a woman’s name at all,” she suggested. “It might be a man’s.”

“Why, of course!” said Miss Grant-Summers. “We never thought of that, did we? It probably is a man’s. P C?” She looked about them. “There are a good many men’s names beginning with P.”

“Paul,” said Mr. Lock indifferently.

“Peter,” said Gay. “Mr. Bouverie’s Peter.”

“Oh, surely you wouldn’t accuse Mr. Bouverie of having written up his name here!” said Miss Grant-Summers reproachfully. “Besides, it’s C, not B.”

“There’s Philip,” said Captain Madgwick.

“Philip, of course; and C might stand for anything—mightn’t it?” said Miss Grant-Summers sweetly. “It might even stand for the girl’s name. Caroline, Cissy, Charlotte, Celia. Do tell us, Mr. Bannatyne.”

Her appeal to him was unexpected. Only she and Madgwick were aware that the initials were his work until that moment; and the two young men and Lady

Cynthia shot at him a glance of interest. The idle problem assumed at once a personal, an individual interest.

The intention of Miss Grant-Summers was patent to Bannatyne. He pulled his knife from his pocket coolly.

"It shows how deeply human nature can err," he said; "also, incidentally, the value of deductions." He stooped to the tree, knife in hand.

"Oh, do let us guess before you finish it!" said Miss Grant-Summers. "P for Philip and C for—" She paused, as if searching in her mind for a name, and her eyes, slewing slowly round, lighted on Lady Cynthia, who caught the look. Instantly in the pallor of her face emerged a pink blush. Bannatyne, with a sweep of his hand, stood back.

"Behold!" he said scornfully; and where the P had been was now a B. He bent again, and in two seconds had completed a third letter.

"A B C," said Madgwick. "Oh, it's the alphabet."

"The alphabet of love?" said Miss Grant-Summers with a little hard laugh. She had not expected this successful ruse.

Bannatyne shook his head, surveying his handiwork.

"There is no such thing as the alphabet of love," he said. "It is a jargon without rules or grammar or cases or anything horrid. It all goes as softly and as easily as a summer day, like this, for instance. It is a country where there are no laws, and only anarchy reigns. It is a wholly mad country, where people don't mind being confused, and not knowing what they mean. Do

they mean anything? I don't know. Do you, Miss Grant-Summers?"

Miss Grant-Summers hesitated ere she replied. "Oh, yes, they mean much. You must know that, Mr. Bannatyne," she said at last. "Their vows cry to Heaven. They live under the stars."

He nodded. "Gone mad under the horns of the moon," he said. "Well, it's a mad world, my masters; isn't it, Madgwick?"

"It's a pretty pleasant world," said Madgwick, lighting a cigarette.

Bannatyne looked round. Lady Cynthia had turned, and was gazing across the sunlit sea of bracken, so that he could not get a glimpse of her face.

"I can imagine it's being a mighty pleasant world if you got all you wished," said Bannatyne. "Can't you, Miss Grant-Summers?"

"On the contrary," observed Mr. Oliver Lock, "it's precisely because of the sharpness of the contrast with what one does not get that one enjoys what one gets."

"That sounds sense," said Bannatyne doubtfully, "if one could only get at it."

"I frankly confess I like what I want," said Miss Grant-Summers.

"I know I always want what I like," said Bannatyne, "including"—he stared before him at the handsome *Hermia*, now no longer hostile, but still challenging—"including," he added, "what is beyond reach."

"'If thy heart fail thee, do not climb at all,'" she quoted. In a way she was grateful that he had taken

her assault so mildly; he evidently bore no animosity, and she began to doubt the truth of her assumptions.

"No, the feat is impossible for me," he said, shaking his head. "I shall conclude the grapes are sour."

"All grapes are not," remarked Gay. "I've tasted some remarkably fine ones this year."

"Well, I'm going to climb down," said Miss Grant-Summers with a laugh, and moved on determinedly.

There was a general movement toward her, but Bannatyne saw with the tail of his eye that Lady Cynthia and Lock were detaching themselves.

"I'm due for a rehearsal of the song with Mr. Lock," she explained to Miss Grant-Summers. "We must go down the shortest way."

"It's perfectly desolating," remarked Lock. "I have that man Cooper to coach, and he's got about as much notion of an air as a foghorn."

"Well, good-by," nodded Miss Grant-Summers cheerfully. "We're going along the downs a little," and, taking it for granted that the rest of the company would follow her, she walked on.

Bannatyne trailed in the rear with Gay, who was good enough to give him some suggestions as to the rendering of *Lysander*, and he was not at all sorry when Miss Grant-Summers at last abruptly made up her mind to descend through a copse into the valley. Lady Fallowfield met them as they entered the house, and nodded in a friendly way at Bannatyne, whom she had not previously seen that morning. He stayed by her.

"I didn't see you at breakfast."

"I breakfasted four miles away."

"Heavens, what a man of his legs!" She shrugged her shoulders, which remained one of her beauties.

"Was that the effect of the contest?"

"Contest?" he asked blankly.

"Yes, the fight with Lord Eastwood."

"Oh, *that*!" he cried with indifference. "Well, I'm glad the fund has benefited so much."

Lady Fallowfield eyed him amiably, but with curiosity. "I know you're a precipitate fellow," she said; "but why this recklessness?"

"Is Lord Eastwood precipitate?" he asked.

She considered. "No."

"Then, *a fortiori*, why this recklessness?" He repeated her question.

Lady Fallowfield's eyes dwelt on him with that direct frankness which was noticeable also in her daughter. She smiled.

"I don't think I should like to have married a man so frivolous as you," she said candidly.

"There you are," said he. "Behold me therefore a bachelor still."

"Rubbish!" said the countess. "You want a harem, not a wife."

"Oh, don't I?" he protested. "Just try me."

"Heaven forbid!" she laughed, as she went off.

"Oh, Heaven has forbidden," he threw after her, and murmured to himself as he too went. "Heaven has forbidden, and shall forbid. A man may not love the mother of his love, though she be the mother of the

loves herself, and though his love be cold as ice and her eyes as frosty as the northern stars. Good morning, Miss Latham."

He paused before the girl, who encountered him shyly, and with a rising color for which he could not account. Then it suddenly flashed upon him that Miss Ashcroft had told her that he knew her secret. She met him quietly. He wondered if he should refer to the matter, but quickly decided that she would thus be thrown into greater confusion. It was best to ignore everything. After all, Miss Ashcroft had not told him in so many words; she had only given him a clew, and it might be supposed that he had not been bright enough to draw the only conclusion. He smiled at the girl in the friendly way he had adopted from the first, but without a show of nearer intimacy.

"I hope you've got your part off by heart," he said with mock earnestness.

Her laughter sounded. "Not quite all," she said, entering into the small jest. No, he decided; she could not know. There was nothing like guilt in her voice. His glance roamed over the pretty face and figure, and lighted on a flower at her bosom. It drew his eyes; it challenged him.

It was a Gloire Lyonnaise.

He could not understand the coincidence. Had Kitty Latham adorned herself with this very rose to emphasize Miss Ashcroft's communication—to advertise, as it were, the revelation? It could not be. He was as sure of Sylvia Latham's daughter as of himself. It

was not in her nature to do what would have seemed merely part of the game to a woman like Miss Grant-Summers. Yet here was the difficulty. It was Kitty Latham's rose he had found; and now, simultaneously with his discovery of that fact, Kitty Latham appeared to him wearing the selfsame rose.

As these thoughts flew through his head he continued to gaze at the flower, and the girl followed his glance. Instantly her face paled, and she fell into confusion.

"Oh, I didn't—Miss Ashcroft—I—" She turned and fled.

It was at once all plain to him, and it was in his heart to have run after her and to comfort her; but, being a wise man, with an insight into human nature, he did not. Kitty had known nothing of his discovery, and it was also obvious that she had not known of the rose at her bosom, or, at least, had not realized what rose it was. As soon as she had done so, and had seen him regarding it so strangely, she had retired in confusion, thinking herself identified.

But since it was Miss Ashcroft who had given her away, in the colloquial phrase, and since it was Miss Ashcroft who had undoubtedly sent her forth to advertise herself with the badge of the rose, why had Miss Ashcroft done it? For some reason she was anxious that he should identify Kitty with his Dryad. But why she should be anxious he could not divine. It smacked of treachery to the girl. He reflected, as he walked, that Miss Ashcroft was eccentric and individual, and that she

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had possibly some idea of a jest buried beneath her obscure operations.

It was high noon by now, and the sun at his zenith glowed in a still heaven. There was no breeze to-day to mollify his rays, and the valley lay sweltering in the heat. The house was silent, and dark with long-drawn blinds. The very dogs lay about the stables, panting, or heaving in uneasy slumber. A buzzing of flies filled the yard as Bannatyne passed through it. He took off his loose Panama and pulled out a handkerchief to wipe the moisture from his forehead. With his own handkerchief came out another—that which he had purchased by auction on the previous night. He turned the square of lace about and gazed at the initial in the corner: C. D. Well, it was his, but he did not really know if he cared to keep it. Perhaps it had better go back to its original owner.

He replaced it in his pocket with his mind still undetermined, and went on his way, sunk in a muse. He had a book with him, and he was looking for a cool and shady spot in which to lie and read or think, as he might feel disposed. He passed by a fringe of the heath where the gorse pods were cracking in the heat, and where the linnet now was silent, and only the song of the yellow-hammer resounded distantly:

“Kiss me quick, quick, quick, and go—ple-ease.”

The last note pleaded pitifully, at least timorously, for instant departure. It was of stolen kisses that the bird sang.

A Fool, a Fool! I Met a Fool i' the Forest

Bannatyne passed under the shadow of the oaks and the green larches that were scattered between them, and thought he heard the tall silver birches rustling overhead. Was it indeed a breeze? He came to a stop.

Yes, a slight wind, so faint as to be inaudible among the stouter foliage, came off the heath and whispered above; it fanned his face. He took off his hat, and it lapped about his face and hair. He turned over the pages of the book, preparatory to sitting down, when his eye was caught by something white a little way from him, under the arch of a beechen bough.

He went forward softly. Her hat had been thrown aside, and her face was resting aslant on a mound of grass; her bosom rose gently with each respiration; her lips were apart, her eyelids closed. A book lay open a few inches from her hand. Lady Cynthia had fallen asleep.

Bannatyne stood gazing down, his own heart beating fast. How fair she looked, how sweet! She lay there, as untroubled in her slumber as a child; as untroubled, he reflected, as in her waking moments, as in her whole peaceful life. Her life was one long slumber, and it might be she would never awake from it. Would Eastwood wake her?

He had the thought, as he stood there, that resignation—renunciation—was perhaps the nobler choice in life. He remembered that fine phrase of Stevenson's that "pain is the choice of the magnanimous," and he wondered. It might be best to breathe his benison over her

dear head and pass; to leave her to the future and the destiny mapped out for her.

But to that succeeded a bitter thought. Who was he, to talk of leaving or not leaving? It was not in his hands. He was merely a man who had behaved with rudeness, and had a handkerchief to restore and an apology to offer.

Her eyelids quivered. Would she wake? The thin breeze streamed off the heath and her hair stirred; the sweet fullness of her lips was toward him. From close at hand rose the yellow-hammer's song:

“Kiss me quick, quick, quick, and go—plea-ease.”

Bannatyne was a creature of impulse always, and he had here the greatest of excuses for his impulse. Impassioned, he bent swiftly, surely, and touched her lips with his as she lay. She stirred slightly, and quivered.

“Kiss me quick, quick, quick, and go-o—ple-ea-ease.”

The song, long drawn upon the last notes, came to him now from afar. He turned swiftly in an access of ashamed rapture. He moved fast among the trees, and plunged into the secluding wood.

CHAPTER XX

CUPID ALL ARM'D

FROM his seat in the billiard room Bannatyne watched Lord Eastwood disappear into the shrubberies with Lady Cynthia. The sun rained heat from wide, bright skies, and the door to the garden stood open under an awning. Bouverie and Hancock, in their shirt sleeves, made a pretense of playing, and Madgwick and some others lounged in the seats and as idly looked on. Lunch was not long over, and coffee was set upon a side table.

"If we played pyramids," suggested Bouverie after a feeble stroke, "more of us could play, and there would be longer rests between the turns. I propose we play pyramids."

"That's all very well," said Hancock, sending home the red with a bang, "but you're not winning."

Bouverie sat down resignedly. "Oh, if you're going to make a long break, it will suit me quite as well," he said. "Call me when he's finished, will some one?"

Bannatyne gazed at the blank shrubberies, which opened not to let back what they had swallowed. Hawk and prey had vanished; hound and hind were on the hillside. Was not the chase in full swing? The party would break up on the following day, and then its

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various components would be scattered; but ere that, Lord Eastwood would have seized his opportunity, and Lady Fallowfield would be smilingly claiming congratulations.

“A sure career . . . undersecretary at forty . . . with a reversion, of course, later . . . in the prime minister's confidence . . .”

He could almost hear the sentences which committed to so little and suggested so much, and he could almost see Lady Fallowfield's frank, friendly, and decided gaze as it would rest on him speculatively. How like her daughter's, but how unlike! He had told Lady Cynthia that she was Allegra, but he was not sure of it now. She wavered between moods so exquisitely poised that he dared not classify her. She was simply adorable; he could get no further than that, and it sufficed; or it would have sufficed had she been adorable for him.

“If she be not fair for me
What care I how fair . . .”

Ah, but he did care; there was the trouble. He saw her sleeping under the shade of the trees again, her cheek pillowed upon one arm, her pulse moving in her white throat; he heard again the sigh as the flutter went down her body; the breath of her life was on his face, as he stooped, and . . .

Bannatyne jumped to his feet, and disturbed a cue that leaned against the cushioned band, which rattled to the floor.

"Confound it, Bannatyne, you spoiled my stroke!" said Hancock crossly, for he had been absorbed in a wonderful break.

"And you've woke me up, confound you!" added Bouverie, stirring. "Not out yet, Hancock? Good Lord!"

Bannatyne left the room. He was restless, and, despite the heat, was driven forth by the spirit that dominated him. Some one called a question at him as he went, but it fell on unheeding ears. No one seemed to desire to be abroad in this fierce fullness of the sun, for not a soul was visible in the house or on the lawns. He thought he saw Miss Arden's face at a window. Yet in this heat Lady Cynthia had gone forth—to her fate? The association of the two at such a juncture could only mean one thing.

Bannatyne reached the park, a shallow vale of Tempe studded with great trees and noble spaces of greensward, and lo! he found he was not alone. Others were abroad besides himself and the reputed lovers. On the ground, beneath a spreading chestnut tree, sat Lady Merrington, fanning herself vigorously, and by her sprawled Gladys, with her black legs askew and her terrier pup.

"There's no air in the house," said the lady as he came up. "Sit down here, Mr. Bannatyne. At least you can't see the sun from here."

Bannatyne sat down. "I can feel it," he said, "and the flies. Gladys, dear, if you can leave that bundle of fireworks a moment, will you throw me a bracken branch? Thank you. If you put one under your hat,

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Lady Merrington, it keeps the flies away and also adds to your appearance."

Lady Merrington looked doubtful. "I think it would make me into a sort of Mænad," she said.

"Let's experiment on Gladys, and see," he suggested. "Gladys, child, come here." Gladys approached demurely, but flushed of face and rough of hair, and he inserted the bracken under her broad hat, so that it depended on three sides about her face. "I think it's more becoming than cabbage leaves," he said critically, "but I'm not sure. Now, Lady Merrington, if you have any desire—" He broke off, for the pup had seized his trousers and was playing tug-of-war with him. "I'm really not hurting your mistress," he explained to it. "Gladys, please reassure the animal that I'm not offering you up in a sacrifice. Those are not my religious principles." He uttered an exclamation as Rip's teeth bit deeper. "And tell him, too, I'm not good for food—Gladys, do! He doesn't seem to pay any attention to my professions. But—you are young yourself. You belong to his epoch and tastes. Tell him, for heaven's sake! take him aside and explain."

He hopped away with mock gravity, and Gladys giggled merrily as she seized the pup in her arms.

"There's only children and animals could be energetic a day like this," remarked Lady Merrington.

"And other animals," corrected Bannatyne; "eh, Gladys?"

"Oh, Mr. Bannatyne," said she, tittering, "how unkind of you!"

"Lady Cynthia Dane's energy enough," went on the lady pensively. "She went down the park a quarter of an hour ago with Lord Eastwood at a fair pace, and a fine couple they looked."

"Oh, indeed!" he replied quickly. "Well, I've energy too, Lady Merrington, as you shall see. I admit it's partly the dog that puts me on the move; but I'm going up yonder fields to pick buttercups. Will you come?"

Lady Merrington shook her head. "There's a turnstile there I couldn't get through," she said. "Besides, I don't want to pick buttercups."

"Good-by, then," said he. "What, Gladys, you coming? That is divine of you; but will you promise to muzzle your animal?"

"He won't bite when he's walking," Gladys assured him; "and if he does, I'll smack him."

"Thank you so much! Lady Merrington, when we find you again, the bower will have grown up about you, like the brier-rose princess."

"I didn't say I was going to sleep," she returned with a smile.

"Don't let us stop you," he said, as they turned away, and, in point of fact, they did not. Lady Merrington's head now drooped on her shoulders, and thus slid gently to the sward beneath the chestnut.

Out in the meadow the puppy barked and growled at the strange monsters he encountered. He retired trepidantly before a young calf, barked at a passing laborer, and then hurled himself like a shot from a

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catapult at his mistress. Gladys caught him as one accustomed to the game, and caressed him. She celebrated his prowess and explained his beauty to Bannatyne.

"He really is an awfully good dog, Mr. Bannatyne. He's only eaten two pairs of my stockings and one slipper; at least, he only ate part of one of each pair, you know—poor little thing."

"Indeed, poor little thing!" said he sympathetically.

They passed out of the field into a patch of wood through which a footpath wandered to a meadow beyond. But at the entrance a second path curled away and tucked itself deeper into the wood, ere it swept about for the farther meadow. It was a kind of circuitous back way. The puppy, on outpost duty in front, decided their route, for he took the longer path, and they meekly followed. Halfway through, the puppy gave vent to a brisk and furious growl, and Gladys cried out:

"It's Lady Cynthia!"

Bannatyne looked up sharply. It was Lady Cynthia for certain, and she was alone. She sat on the bank beside the path, and was looking down upon the house and park, and she turned on the cry, but did not move.

"We were so hot that we decided to pick buttercups," said he, "and then Rip decided that we shouldn't. We are slaves to him. He wanted us successively to eat a cow, to bite a man's leg, and to swallow two bees, but we refused. And now he wants us to sit down."

"And so you refuse again," said Lady Cynthia lightly.

"Oh, no; this time we must give in," said he, sit-

ting down near her. "We can't afford to offend him—can we, Gladys? Our lives and stockings depend on keeping him in a good temper."

He had thrown a searching glance at her. Why was she alone? What had happened during the last half hour? Lady Cynthia's face showed signs of agitation; she was pale and restless; yet her tone was light. It seemed as if she was keeping it light of set purpose. She did not look at him; but then, she did not look at Gladys either.

"He's a terrible responsibility," she said.

"He is indeed," agreed Bannatyne, "especially being so delicate. I don't think I should keep him up too late, Gladys. I'm sure it's near his bedtime."

"I'm sure it isn't," said Lady Cynthia quickly. "The walk will do him good."

"He will get morbid," protested Bannatyne. "A dog robbed of his beauty sleep develops hydrophobia and kleptomania and lots of things. Take him to bed, Gladys—take him to bed."

"Don't," said Lady Cynthia in her new tone of levity. "Let him enjoy himself, poor thing! The time will come when he must grow into a serious fox-terrier. Let him enjoy himself while he may."

"Do you mind his enjoying your lace very much?" asked Bannatyne, looking doubtfully at the mischievous puppy at her feet.

Lady Cynthia glanced down at her dress, and cried out: "Oh, the little wretch! Oh, how horrid! Please, Gladys, take him away!"

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"Slap him," suggested Bannatyne.

Lady Cynthia slapped him ineffectually. The puppy accepted it as a jovial invitation to a competition. He began his favorite game of tug-of-war with growls.

"Oh!" cried Lady Cynthia in dismay, and Gladys arrived just in time to prevent a tragedy.

Lady Cynthia had now lost her pallor, and was flushed. The incident had improved her spirits, for it had been a counter irritant.

"I think he'd better go now," said Bannatyne, who had no further use for Gladys at the moment.

"Oh, no; he's all right," said Lady Cynthia faintly; and to Gladys, who was rising: "No, don't take him away. He'll be quite good, I'm sure."

It was clear that Lady Cynthia had some use for Gladys, who fell back again with her pup in her arms.

"I'm glad he's not the size of a cow," observed Bannatyne, "or he'd eat us. Fancy a wood peopled with pups the size of cows. We couldn't keep them in houses then, you know. You'd meet Jones limping, with his arm in a sling, and say, 'Halloo, my dear fellow! hurt yourself?' 'Yes, the fact is,' says Jones, 'my pup jumped on my knee the other day.' Or you'd see pretty Miss Brown with her hand bound up. 'I'm so sorry! What have you done to yourself?' 'Oh,' says Miss Brown, 'my pup snapped off two fingers last night while he was playing with me.'"

"Oh, don't!" said Lady Cynthia.

"Well, these things do happen," he urged, "only we shut our eyes to them. We are such hypocrites. People

lose their fingers and break their arms. I'll confess I shy at bald facts as much as anyone. I'm just as great a hypocrite and coward. Why isn't the world only romantic? Why isn't it only beautiful?"

Gladys was giving most of her attention to Rip.

Lady Cynthia answered after a pause: "I suppose there's design in it."

"There's nothing left to us but the supposition," he said sadly. "The old days of fairies were the best; and think, Lady Cynthia, of a world according to the mythology of the Greeks. How astonishing!" He broke off, as a memory came to him, the memory of what he had learned from Miss Ashcroft. He darted on impulsively: "Do you know, I've found out—" Then he paused uncertainly.

Lady Cynthia cast a glance at him. "What have you found out?" she asked impersonally. "Anything of great interest?"

"To me, yes," he said. "At least I don't know. It would have been once. I may as well finish, as I have begun. You remember my idle story of an empty day—'The Dryad and the Shoe'?"

"Perfectly," said she, looking down at the house in the strong sun.

"Lady Cynthia, I believe he's getting his new teeth," said Gladys excitedly.

"Is he?" said Lady Cynthia, but she did not smile.

"Well, I've found her."

"Really? How interesting!" murmured Lady Cynthia.

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"Yes, it came out by accident. It wasn't my doing," he went on. "But now that I've succeeded in the quest I feel as if I'd been rather foolish about it."

"I certainly don't see what advantage you gain," she remarked, and her pallor seemed to have returned.

"However, I don't think she knows I know," he confessed.

Lady Cynthia looked suddenly round at him and then away. It was as if she had been startled.

"That is the very best that could happen," she said after a pause.

"And as that is my opinion also, there shall it rest," he said lightly.

"What's the time, Mr. Bannatyne?" demanded Gladys suddenly, scrambling to her feet.

"Nearly four o'clock," said he, pulling out his watch.

"Oh, goodness, I've got to meet Miss Grace at four!" said Gladys remorsefully. "Come along, Rip! Rip! Rip!"

She ran down the pathway, her charge at her heels, and Lady Cynthia saw her protection vanish. Yet she still sat on the bank, and Bannatyne sat by in silence. There were whispers in the foliage above them. This was the first time they had been together, the first time they had talked with each other, since the incident of the night before. Bannatyne wondered if he should refer to it, wondered also if he should beg for pardon. The next moment he decided against this course. If she recalled it, it would be time enough to acknowledge his offense. If she had passed it and condoned it, to sum-

mon up the ghost of it would be to offend again wantonly. Suddenly he put his hand in his pocket.

"Oh, Lady Cynthia, I have something to restore to you," he said.

"To me?" she asked with faint inquiry in her voice, and without looking toward him.

"Yes." He held out the handkerchief. "This is yours, I think."

She was forced to look now, but did so trepidantly.

"Oh, yes," she said uneasily, but keeping herself in hand. "You mean last night. But, of course, it's yours. You bought it."

"It should never have been offered for sale," said he gravely.

"No, it shouldn't," she agreed shortly, and added presently, "But as it was it doesn't matter. Mr. Bouverie thought it was Kitty's."

"Oh, of course; we all thought that," he said slowly, watching her.

There was a change upon her face, but what it was he could not make out; it was an occult shadow of change, indefinable. Again her gaze returned to the scene below. But Bannatyne persisted; he had not yet done. Something flared up in his heart like fire. Yesterday Lady Fallowfield had said that there was no engagement. Was there now? At any rate, he knew nothing of it, and he was free, free to say what he wished, and what was on his tongue, as a loyal, honest man who kept the world's code of honor.

"Then I may keep it?" he inquired gently.

“Naturally, if I renounce it,” she answered. “Unless you wish to give it away.”

He raised it to his lips and put it back in his pocket, and now Lady Cynthia's shoulder was turned on him. He could not tell if she had witnessed his act of homage. Nor did he care if she had; he was reckless; he was moving slowly on the wings of a great passion.

“I wonder,” said Lady Cynthia, “if there will be a large audience this evening.”

“We must all hope so for the sake of Lady Coombe's—” He had been going to say “charity,” but he stopped short of the word. He remembered his conduct of the previous night, and he was reluctant to recur to the subject. He was ashamed that he had so openly entered the lists against Eastwood, and with a gage so manifest on his lance. Everyone must have known, he felt, and grew hot. It would have been only one shade worse if Lady Cynthia had herself been present, but, fortunately, both she and her mother were absent from the auction. But everyone must have known—Bouverie, Hancock, Miss Grant-Summers, all. That was why Miss Grant-Summers had turned her wit upon him in the morning. By his behavior he had brought the assault upon him, and in so doing had shamed the girl beside him. She was probably all unconscious at present, aware only that her handkerchief had been used; but she must learn soon from some one's lips, and surely then would wheel upon him burning eyes of scorn and indignation. That she should have been put up in the mart of curious eyes and ears, to be the

cockshy of contending passions! The thought was abominable; it made him shiver. He stopped abruptly on the word "charity."

Lady Cynthia said nothing. With an indrawing of breath he recovered himself, watching her face as it was presented to him in bare profile. He did not see her hand upon the farther side, which, ungloved, was plucking restlessly at the grasses. The flight of his passion had been interrupted by these trajectory considerations, but as he gazed on her it rose from that dull, unhappy sweep to earth, and soared high—strong—invincible.

He had an infinite pity for her, but it was the pity of an infinite love.

"I wish you would let me tell you something, Lady Cynthia," he began softly.

You might have heard the beat of those wings, as it had been the steady beat of a heart. Lady Cynthia answered nothing, but her face moved slightly toward him, though she was still looking down on the house, the gardens, and the sunlit park. In the distance the gleaming water by the pool of which Bannatyne had met her once was just visible.

It was her attitude that rendered him a modest assent, an indifferent assent, though he would have gone on in despite of her attitude. Louder and stronger beat the pinions. Lady Cynthia's underlip quivered, unseen of him; her heart fluttered like a caged bird, fluttered and fell back. Below, the happy scene was engrossed in a blind mist before his eyes, in which no individual item was recognizable.

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"I want to say," said Bannatyne in his musical voice, equable still, but with a gathering note in it—"I want to say that I bought this last night not because of the charity, but because of you."

Lady Cynthia's heart beat against its prison bars.

"You shouldn't have done that," she was able to say.

"I'm glad I did it," he said. "If it were all of you that should ever come to me (as well it might be), do you think I'm not rejoiced that I did it?"

"It—it was absurd," murmured Lady Cynthia. "It—it was ridiculous. You had no right——"

"Ah, no right. You are right," he said. "But what rights do we consider at such a time? I am a man, and I have the rights of a man."

She moved restlessly as if she would rise, and there was clearly something of deep interest that claimed her eyes down in the park. She did not speak, and he went on now at a faster rate.

"And here, now, I ask you something on the top of that confession," he said. "I have lived five-and-thirty years, Lady Cynthia, and I've seen a good deal of life, and overlooked, at any rate, a good deal of love."

"Oh, of course," she murmured hurriedly. "But that doesn't excuse you for making—for using—for not——"

She did not finish, her voice trailing away into silence.

"Oh, I was wrong to advertise what I felt, I know," he admitted impetuously. "But I could not bear that some one else should have anything of yours. At least I felt I must have that, even if it were all I should

ever have. And if anyone were so happy, so fortunate, as to take all, I felt, Lady Cynthia, I should at least have *that*. *That* could not be taken from me."

"If you had been going to pay money, you should have paid it for the charity," she murmured. "It was wrong. It was not nice; it was——"

Bannatyne rose impulsively and drew a step toward her. She looked at him, as though with eyes of fear; and, in truth, she feared. This was not the irresponsible, light-hearted man she had known; this was a transfigured man. She shrank from him in affright, and by the aid of a branch at her hand got to her feet, her body tremulous throughout.

"Lady Cynthia," he said, with his hands toward her, "I have sinned, but it was sin for you. Tell me——"

"No, no," she cried, her heart wild in its cage, her heart crying in terror, in a panic, in a mist of emotion it did not understand. "No, no; you must not—you—I——"

She suddenly turned about and began to run down the grassway toward the edge of the wood. Bannatyne stood for a moment bewildered by the unexpected act, and then he followed her, running lightly.

A bend in the path hid her for a time, and when he also had turned it he saw that the distance between them was not diminished. She fled with the speed and lightness of a fawn, of a wild wood nymph, as she had fled once before. Here again was Daphne flying from him, through the dim wood.

The path took another curve, and she vanished again;

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and when he reached it she was nowhere to be seen. The path slipped along the margin of the wood, but no one was visible there; and beyond the wood itself a field of gray-green corn rolled down to a distant road. Banatyne stood in wonder, gazing at it.

As he looked, puzzled and chagrined, he was aware of a movement in the standing corn, and a hundred yards away he caught sight of a white figure moving swiftly. He plunged into the waving corn waist deep. The white figure fled through the green sea, breast high about her, and he followed.

She reached the farther edge and disappeared into the wood anew, and once more he pursued the chase. The wood here was grown rankly with brambles and bracken, and the close trees shrouded it darkly. No path ran this way, and the girl had to struggle through the ragged underwood as best she might.

“Thorough bush, thorough brier.”

The briers caught her frock, and she was stayed perforce to disengage it; the brambles scratched her bare hand. She struggled on farther, and sank at last on the bole of a great beech in a subdued light, her bosom heaving deeply, her breath coming fast. She had fled in panic on an impulse which she could not resist, but she knew not why she had fled. The confusion in her mind and heart was so wild that she scarcely knew anything at all. She was incapable of reason, and moved merely to the rule of emotions. Why was this? What had so strangely unhinged her? As she sat now, the

shadow of her fear still upon her, she could have sobbed. She listened for footsteps, and trembled when she heard them; listened again, and her heart ached that they had died away. Why had she run? Something—what was it?—would have happened if she stayed. Ah, that was why she had run. Something would have happened.

She heard him coming now, and her heart seemed to pause in its beating to listen. Nearer he drew and nearer through the fern; her heart sickened; nearer still. She could not move; she looked up, and across at the moving form, like a hunted creature—like that nymph who fled before the god.

Bannatyne emerged from the undergrowth, and saw her, and in two strides he was by her.

“Mine, Cynthia, mine!” he cried passionately, and took her hands.

“No, no,” she sobbed. “No, no.”

“Mine, Cynthia!” he cried again, and took her in his arms.

Her wild heart broke its prison bars, and his lips met hers. Her heart turned and nestled shyly, wonderingly, contentedly, in its refuge, which was his.

“Beloved!” he murmured.

She broke into gentle sobbing, into happy and bewildered tears.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CURTAIN RISES

LORD EASTWOOD, standing in conversation with the gatekeeper on the subject of allotments, saw Lady Cynthia Dane and Bannatyne enter the park together. His glance, which had been sharply visiting the particulars of the lodge in his customary way, wandered after them; but he did not follow until five minutes later, and when he did he had just the same note of confidence and importance in his stride. It might have been observed that he whistled as he went, which was not his habit, and he flung his stick in the air somewhat extravagantly. His actions were usually conducted according to an austere rule. He drank tea, and complimented Lady Coombe on her enterprise in the matter of the pastoral play.

“I must send you the check, by the way, when I get back to town,” he said calmly.

There were, therefore, some reasons why Lord Eastwood should, as Lady Fallowfield put it, “go far”; for there was a certain fineness of quality in his resistance.

Bannatyne was not at tea, nor was Lady Cynthia. The sun was tempered toward five o'clock by a soft wind through the valley, and after entering the park they had not proceeded direct to the house, but had

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wandered by a devious way through the Wilderness. It was cool there, and it was silent. Lady Cynthia walked now in a dream, in a dream from which she was sometimes on the point of waking, but a dream in which were no nightmares or evil things.

"I wondered once whether you were Allegra or Penserosa," Bannatyne told her, "and now I know. You are both. My Allegra!"

She cast him a shy smile.

"And so in one half hour you have rejected and accepted lovers," he said, for he could not keep away from the subject.

"Oh, I didn't say—" began the girl.

"No, you didn't say, sweetheart," he said; "I guessed."

There was a little silence, and she said shyly, "I didn't accept anyone. You never gave me the chance."

He laughed joyously. "Not I."

"But I thought you were so devoted to Miss Grant-Summers," she said presently.

"You did nothing of the kind, dear heart," he answered. "You have known all along, I'll vow. Why, it was written in large, it was painted in colors. In pursuance of an idle game, I adapted myself to the methods of *Hermia* and *Helena*. But I have done with games now. I am in dead earnest."

Cynthia made no remark until they had gone some way, and then she said, in a small voice:

"You told me you had vowed to marry the lady with the—with the foot."

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"The lady with the foot! Oh, bother the lady with the foot!" he said gayly.

"But you made a vow," she protested shyly.

"If I did, I'm going to break it," he said. "Frankly, you're not going to marry your earl, and I'm not going to marry my Dryad."

"But you are," said Lady Cynthia softly.

He halted, and looked at her in bewilderment.

"I found out last night it was Miss Latham," he said.

Lady Cynthia was smiling and blushing. She shook her head. "No, it was Kitty who took the shoe—from your room. But she did it to help me. I——"

"You!" he cried, a great light dancing in his eyes. "You! It was you, Cynthia! Oh, was ever anything in life so directly the effort of fate, of destiny? You are my Dryad, darling. Oh, I should have known it, I should have guessed it; perhaps I should have guessed it if I had had a little longer." He drew her to him. "Tell me how it was. I will hear all," he commanded.

She held away from him, still blushing. "It was hot—oh, so hot!—and I wasn't wanted at the rehearsal; and I found myself near the pool, and it just came into my head somehow to dabble in the water. It sounded so cool, and looked so cool in the moonlight. And I—and I didn't hear you come, and when I put my—my foot under the stream I felt it touch you——"

"Touch!" said Bannatyne, opening his eyes. "Touch, indeed! A monstrous hard kick," he declared.

“—and I couldn’t help crying out. I was startled. And I had just time to pick up my—my shoes——”

“And stockings, dear,” he said. “Don’t forget the stockings.”

“—and—and I felt one of them drop. I was horrified; but I did get away without your seeing me, didn’t I?” she finished triumphantly.

“I saw a fairy gliding through the shadows; I caught a glimpse of a ravishing shape ’twixt bole and bole; I had but a vision of heaven, and it was gone.”

Lady Cynthia was no longer resistant.

“So you will have kept your vow; you are not forsworn,” she said softly.

“I knew I should,” he said complacently. “I knew I should run her to earth. I’m awfully clever.” After a little he thought of something. “Then what has Kitty to do with it?” he asked suddenly.

“I told her,” said Lady Cynthia, “as I was really rather—well, abashed, you know. And we came to the conclusion it must be you, particularly as Kathleen Merrington said you had been talking some nonsense about shoes; and so Kitty offered to get it back for me.”

“And she did, the thief! I’ll never believe in the goodness of woman again. I thought I could have trusted Kitty.”

“So you can,” she assured him. “Kitty is the faithfulest soul in the world. That’s why she did it for me. She’s devoted to me, and so am I to her.”

“To me, you mean, dear,” he corrected.

Cynthia could blush divinely.

"Then Miss Ashcroft thinks it's Kitty?" he said, seeing light.

"Yes. Kitty ran into her room by mistake on—when you were so horrid as to run after her," said Lady Cynthia, "and she was hiding there when you knocked. But Miss Ashcroft had been waked up, and afterwards Kitty told her what she'd done; but she didn't say anything about me, and so Miss Ashcroft thought it was Kitty who—whom you met in the woods."

"Kitty's a brick!" he said; "and now, since you've made confession so prettily, I, too, will go into the box." He took her face between his two hands and gazed into it with grave affection. "Darling, did you dream this morning?"

Cynthia's face was flushed. "I always dream at night," she said.

"I was not talking of the night. I meant, did you dream, about twelve o'clock this morning, under the trees up yonder?"

Cynthia's face was suffused with fire; she stirred restlessly.

"No; answer me ere I free you."

"I—I don't think so," she said faintly.

"Cynthia, this is my confession, for which I plead for absolution. I did not kiss those lips just now for the first time. I——"

He stopped, gazing ardently upon her. "I kissed you there as you lay asleep. The woman tempted me, and I did eat. Do you forgive me, child? Have I absolution? Think of my temptation!"

"Yes," she said weakly, adding, still more weakly, "I knew you did."

"Knew it?" he said in astonishment.

"Yes, I felt it was you. I was—I wasn't quite asleep. I was only sort of dozing, and I woke, and"—then with a change of voice which was almost indignant—"do you think I would have let anyone—I mean, have not been furious if it had been anyone else?"

He kissed her lips again.

They had reached the edge of the Wilderness, and before them lay the glade in full sunshine. Slowly, reluctantly, they began to go down toward the house.

"Go to your room, dearest," said he, when they were nearing the gardens. "I will return presently and see your mother."

She gave him a smile of confidence, and, gathering her skirts, tripped lightly away, vanishing round a bend in the hedge. Bannatyne's eyes followed her fondly, and then he made up toward the hall by another way. The sound of voices talking merrily reached him, and presently through the trees he discerned Chloe Merrington seated upon the topmost bar of a gate and swinging idly. His heart was full to overflowing, and he went up to her, as she swung, looking neither to right nor to left.

"Miss Chloe," said he, "do you know I'm thinking of being married?"

Chloe, whose face had been preparing itself for the smile with which she was wont to greet him, started,

lost her balance, and toppled backward. Bannatyne seized hold of her skirts, and thus she came softly to the ground, in pretty disarray. Bannatyne was now aware of others whom he had not noticed. From either side of him a young man sprang forward and stooped to pick up the distressed damsel. But the assistance had arrived too coincidently, and Gay's smooth head bumped upon Walrond's with a resounding noise.

"Sorry," said both simultaneously, staggering aside with the force of the impact.

Bannatyne helped Chloe to her feet.

"I'm so glad," she panted, rose-red, breathless, and smiling at him. The tears were in Gay's eyes as he rubbed his head, and one coursed down his red cheek.

"Well, it didn't really hurt," he said manfully; "though, of course, we didn't do it on purpose"; but Walrond was frowning.

"Don't tell anyone," said Bannatyne, whispering. "You're the only one who knows."

"Is it—it's Lady Cynthia?" whispered back Chloe excitedly.

He nodded. "Mum's the word, Miss Chloe. Be as secret as the grave."

"You can trust me. Oh, I will, Mr. Bannatyne," she breathed, and stood watching him pass away with eager interest.

The frown deepened on Walrond's face.

Bannatyne had been unable to resist the impulse to break his news to Chloe, of whom he was very fond; but he had not yet broken it to Lady Fallowfield, and

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that was his first duty. He sought her at once, and, having drunk a cup of tea he did not want, succeeded in disengaging her at last from the company. She looked at him questioningly when they were alone. He had taken her upon the lawns.

"You're going to say something serious," she said; "that is evident. Is it to apologize for bringing Cynthia's name into last night's stupid scene?"

"Her name was never mentioned," he replied, wincing ever so little. "Lord Eastwood and I were bidding for charity."

She eyed him with open doubt.

"And I had the privilege of winning," he went on. "Charity, Lady Fallowfield, covers a multitude of sins."

"I'm not sure that it covers this," she said dryly. "Well, if you aren't going to apologize, what is it you want?"

"To remind you, my dear lady, that in the revised version of the Bible another word takes the place of charity. There remain faith, hope, and charity—these three, you remember. But charity is not charity; it is love."

Lady Fallowfield was momentarily silent; then she stirred, and so that her dress rustled.

"This is all very interesting, no doubt," she said. "But I can make neither head nor tail of it. It smacks of the sentimental."

"Well, I've done your accounts for you," he said, with his shy, humorous look.

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Lady Fallowfield's eyes flashed, and her brow was set in a frown.

"This means, I take it, that you have proposed to Cynthia," she said bluntly. "I don't think I'm a fool, though I dare say she is."

"On the contrary, she seems to me to have very good sense," he said, resuming the light mood for purposes of defense.

"I see." The countess considered. "So that's the meaning of the horseplay last night." She was silent again. "I could, of course, put my foot down," she said.

"I have always admired it," said he, glancing down at her skirt.

"I don't say anything about money," she went on with resolute frankness. That's not the score on which I or Fallowfield would take exception. It's—" She paused.

"I know," he intervened. "There's the prospects. He's a coming man, and I'm a cipher."

"He's a come man; he's arrived," she said dryly.

"Yes, it is me who's the coming man; I forgot," he said meekly.

Lady Fallowfield smiled. "You are incorrigible, but I don't know if it wouldn't help you. It might carry you far. Lord Eastwood's somewhat lacking in lightness."

"A regular stick!" said Bannatyne eagerly.

She smiled again. "I don't know that Fallowfield would object if the career was certain."

"I'll get Bouverie to put me up for Parliament,"

he told her. He was aware of a big form that moved under the shadow of a deodar not far away. "It's Lord Eastwood," he said. "I fear I am keeping him from you."

She glanced toward the deodar. "I dispose of my own time," she returned. "Nor do I suppose he is in a hurry to say what he has to say," she said grimly. "If you think about that career, we might take it for granted."

"Cynthia will help me," he assured her. "She inspires me. I will do anything for her."

"She would be corrective, no doubt," agreed the countess, "unless she's fool enough to have fallen in love."

"Ah, Lady Fallowfield," said he sadly, "is the game worth it without? Is the round worth going?"

"Oh, you mustn't ask me emotional questions," she said. "As I told you, I've given up problems. I'm too busy with real affairs."

"It is the only real affair," he said in a lower voice.

She gave him a glance. "I believe you think so sincerely. It characterizes the situation invariably. Well, after that you will have your career and will thank me for that, at least. I don't know that I accept your ideals; they're too immaterial. But let them pass."

"I'll accept any ideal you like, if you'll let me have Cynthia," he pleaded.

She nodded in a friendly way. "On terms," she said, as she turned to go. He seized her hand.

A Midsummer Day's Dream

"Since it couldn't be you, I'm glad it's Cynthia," he said, half smiling, half serious.

She smiled back at him as he kissed her fingers.

"Well, as it couldn't be Eastwood, I suppose I'm glad it's you," she said pleasantly, and passed away with a little color freshening on her handsome face.

The excitement which had been latent all the day, and which nothing but the heat had suppressed, began now to swell rapidly. It was but two hours to the time of the performance, and already some of the audience had arrived to tea, by carriage and motor car. The stables began to fill, and strange servants in livery were visible in odd corners. Bannatyne had arranged with Lady Fallowfield that nothing was to be said for the present about his engagement. It would be time enough on the morrow, when all the excitement had subsided. Indeed, Lady Fallowfield was not at all anxious that it should come out at once. So might she be able to make her retreat in a masterly manner from the Eastwood campaign.

Neither Cynthia nor Bannatyne cared whether their engagement was published or not; they were indifferent to others and engrossed only in themselves. Chloe knew, but Chloe was bound to secrecy. Only one other would Cynthia tell, and that was Kitty Latham. Kitty was her dear friend and intimate, and it was due to her that she should be informed.

Incidentally, however, yet another member of the house party became acquainted with the secret. Out on the lawn was Gladys and her pup, rioting in utter de-

fiance of the heat; and while the turmoil of preparation raged throughout the house, and while as yet Lady Cynthia was invisible, Bannatyne strayed forth and joined them. His heart was more akin to Gladys's than than to any maturer person's. He encouraged the gambols, clapped his hands, and directed the predatory assaults of the puppy. It passed him on its way to Gladys, a leaping wave. He stopped and patted it.

"Thank you, puppy," said he, with a feeling of gratitude surging in his bosom.

"Woof!" said Rip, and, forgetting Gladys and his proposed frontal attack, made a diversion in the rear of a new enemy. His needles were fixed in Bannatyne's trousers, and he pulled and growled alternately.

"Such hilarity bespeaks not only happiness, but innocence," said a voice behind him.

He turned, abandoning his efforts to detach Rip, and saw Miss Ashcroft.

"Are you referring to me, or Rip?" he asked.

"Both," she returned. "Innocence dwells in the hearts of Rips, paradox as it may be."

"Oh," he said; "then I'm condemned to Rip's category? Well, it's simply impossible to prove a negative." He paused, remembering what Cynthia had told him. "By the way," he went on, "I once swore to marry a certain lady."

"Did you carry it out?" she inquired.

"No; not, that is, yet. But I think I shall."

"Is the fortunate woman known to any of us?"

He hesitated. "Yes. Gladys, please call off your troops. I surrender. I offer terms."

Gladys smilingly disengaged the rampant puppy and took him off in her arms fondly.

"Perhaps I can guess," she said, smiling.

"Perhaps you can, but I think we both have blundered. You remember a rose?"

"A rose! I remember several. I grow them."

"Yes, I know. But some one was hiding under the rose. That, like what I'm telling you, is *sub rosa*."

"I can keep a secret."

"Behind that rose was not what appeared; and since you can guess at what you so kindly call the fortunate woman, maybe you can guess what the rose sheltered."

Miss Ashcroft looked puzzled.

"I believe I'm very dull," she said slowly. "And yet I've always prided myself on a decent intelligence."

"You and I were taken in," he said. "A certain thief was not the culprit. I believe you know part of the story. A lightsome fairy stole on behalf of another."

There was a pause. "If I understand aright," said the lady in a curious tone, "you pursued a will-o'-the-wisp."

"I've been doing it all my life till now," he assented.

Again she paused, while her quick mind, which had followed these hints, took a jump toward the identity he had merely shadowed.

"This party, I think," she said next in a harder voice, "is quite a marriage market. If I'd had a

The Curtain Rises

daughter I would certainly have brought her down here."

"She would have done credit to her mother, I'm sure," he said politely, though he did not understand the change in her.

"But not having a daughter of my own," she went on, "I did my best—" She stopped abruptly. "I'm not sentimental," she said sharply, "so don't look for sympathy. I shall give my congratulations to some one else—Lord Eastwood, perhaps."

"Personally I would give him anything at the moment," he told her.

She turned away abruptly, and as she went called over her shoulder:

"If you can be happy, be so; but it's time you left some one else a chance."

It was her last shot, and he did not pretend to understand it. He gathered that Miss Ashcroft was offended with him, but he did not know why. He did not even know if she had guessed aright. Perhaps, he reflected, she had made a wrong shot and disapproved. It would be easy for Miss Ashcroft to disapprove of, say, Miss Grant-Summers. But the subject did not remain in his mind more than a few minutes. It would have been odd if it had done so on that glorious afternoon, and with that fount of joy bubbling within him.

The time was drawing on; already an influx of the audience was beginning, and in *Titania's* Glade the London contractors were busy with the arrangement of the seats.

A Midsummer Day's Dream

"Do you feel nervous, Bannatyne?" inquired Bouverie as he overtook his friend on his way to the theater.

"I shall never feel nervous again," said Bannatyne. "I shall act *Lysander* to the life. I shall be a success."

"You've been a great success," said Bouverie, "all along. I think you've been too great a success. I think you are marked out for success."

"I wonder if they'd think so in the House."

Bouverie uplifted his hands. "They don't think there," he said.

"Shall I come and teach 'em?"

"If you did, my son," said Peter Bouverie solemnly, "I should find life more endurable. No one would ever be certain of reaching the right lobby. The papers would have a good time, and, of course, the King's Government would go on all the same. We've nothing to do with that. That's done by clerks."

"I'm serious," said Bannatyne, smiling.

Bouverie contemplated him. "Dear me!" was all he said.

Lady Cynthia had not appeared. The sun was low in the west, and the shadows were on the valley; the cool of the evening was come, and the scents of midsummer rose on the air.

The bustle in the open theater was tremendous; the audience was slowly drifting into the seats, and somewhere in the unseen distance two fiddles were tuning up. Hancock ran to and fro perspiring; he mopped his brow. Calls, shouts, and replies echoed down the glade.

The Curtain Rises

Behind the rhododendron bushes was gathered the company of performers, Lady Coombe in a desperate state of nerves and fretting over trifles, Bouverie calm and reassuring.

Bannatyne's heart leaped. Issuing from the Wilderness behind he saw Cynthia, and with her Kitty Latham. She was in her pale-blue fairy dress, thin gauze wings shining in a gleam of the setting sun. He moved impetuously toward her, scarcely noticing Kitty.

"You look divine, queen of the fairies," he whispered.

"No, that's Lady Coombe," she whispered back playfully, and added, "I've seen mamma. She kissed me."

He nodded, and looked toward Kitty, who in the rose light seemed pale and anxious.

"Kitty knows," said Cynthia.

"Kitty!" he said softly.

"I wish you great happiness, Mr. Bannatyne," said Kitty Latham. "I wish you both the greatest happiness."

Her voice was quiet, but unsteady; tears seemed to tremble it. Cynthia put an arm about her, and she choked back a little sob.

"Children, Hancock is waving," cried Bannatyne warningly. "Let us galumph. No, let us walk sedately, and like members of Parliament. This is a serious world, Kitty. Ask Cynthia."

"Ready, there?" inquired Hancock to the musicians in the background. "Now, then, it's no use waiting. They've been seated quite ten minutes, and the whole business will run us into dark."

A Midsummer Day's Dream

Miss Chloe stood between Walrond and Gay in her fairy gown, tittering and smiling. Kitty Latham's eyes wandered in her direction and rested there; then they came back to her companions, who were talking together in a low voice. Beneath her girdle Kitty's heart beat like a watch.

"We're not going to Gratton," murmured Cynthia.

"No; you're coming to the Chace," he whispered back.

"Is all our company dissembled?" asked Bouverie, looking round. "Is Lady Cynthia there? Who's seen——"

"*Adsum; adest*," said Bannatyne promptly.

"Humph!" said Bouverie, his gaze lingering on them significantly. "Now's our chance," he said to Ferris, near him. "The field's left open now."

"Stop that chattering," commanded Hancock. "Listen to me now. Take it crisply in the opening scene, and don't lose your heads. Mrs. Battye, Madgwick! Now, Mrs. Battye, please! Your dress is quite right, I assure you. Madgwick, come along! Now Lock, strike up."

The fiddles started.

The players in the first scene moved toward the verge of their cover.

"If it were only moonlight!" murmured Bannatyne. "I don't like the garish day."

He looked at her with smiling eyes that held significance, and, shyly smiling, she looked back.

All the others were looking toward the auditorium,

The Curtain Rises

and Kitty Latham's presence had been forgotten. She turned quickly away and stole silently off among the sheltering bushes.

"Now," commanded Hancock.

Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, PHILOSTRATE, *and*
Attendants.

(1)

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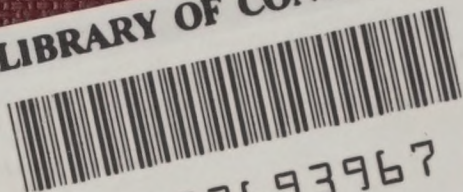
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